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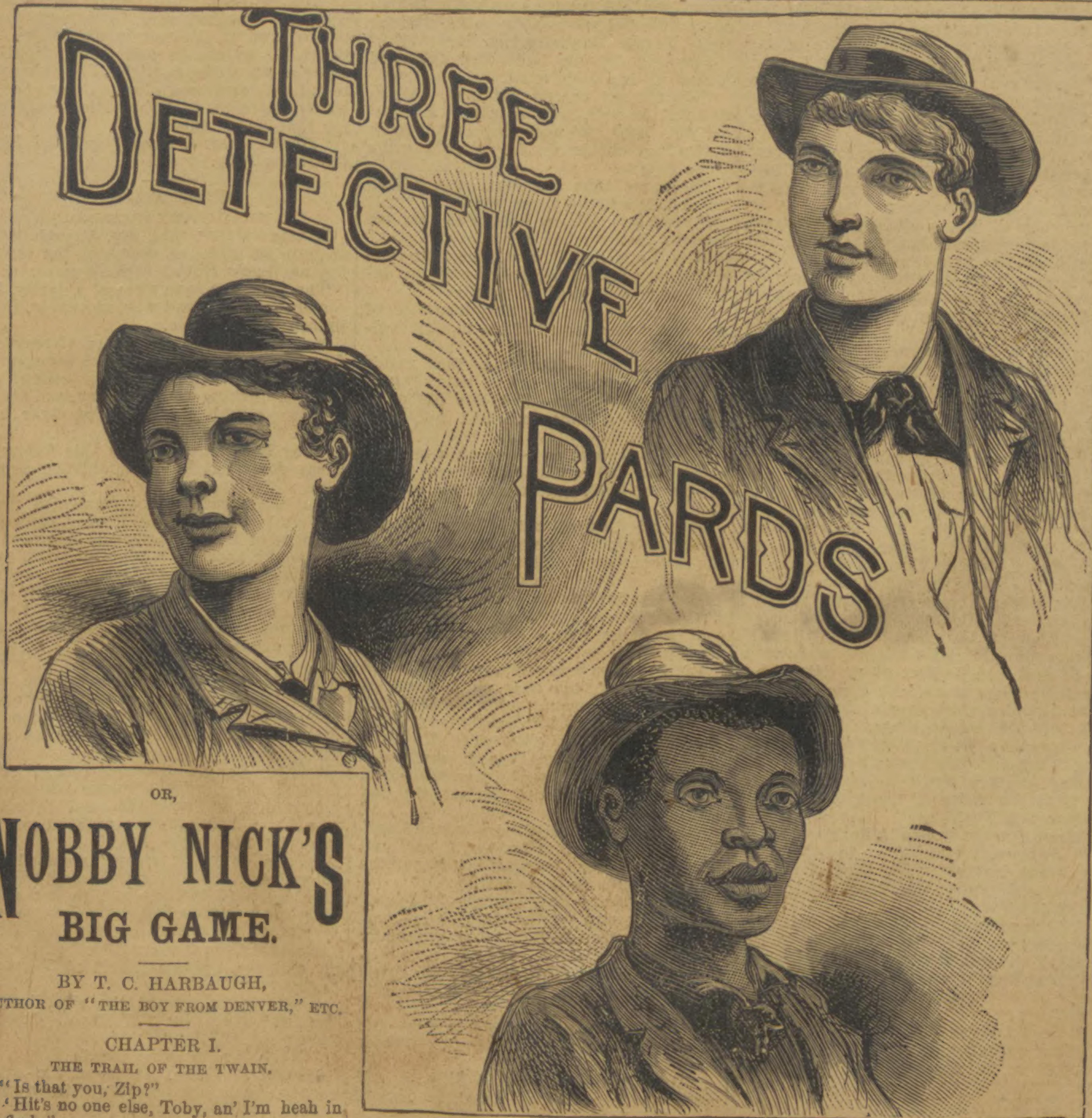
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OR, HOBBY NICK'S BIG GAME.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "THE BOY FROM DENVER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAIL OF THE TWAIN.

"Is that you, Zip?"
"Hit's no one else, Toby, an' I'm heah in
de flesh."

TOBY TIP & CO.

Three Detective Pards.

"In a minute, then."

A door soon opened and a half-dressed boy stood before the bright-eyed colored youth who stepped in from the hall.

"Hit's a matter o' business, an', as I couldn't wait till mornin', I thought I'd jes' drop round an' post you a little, you see."

"That's right, Zip. You know you're welcome at all times, and you can't come too late nor too early if you have something new to impart."

"Jes wot I thought, Toby."

The speakers were Toby Tip and Zip Coppers, the dock detectives, and the boys who, with Teaser, their pard, had secured the hearty hatred of the evildoers of the Great City.

As Zip walked across the room his face seemed to light up with new intelligence, and as Toby leaned against the bed which he had just deserted to answer the darkey's rap, Zip dropped upon a chair.

For a moment he passed his hand across his brow, mopping it, as it were, for his walk had been rapid and the night was quite warm; then he said:

"Hit's about the disappearance of dat banker on Wall Street, Mr. Lore."

"Have you struck the trail, Zip, on the Lincoln Lore case?"

"Don't know 'bout dat, but I calkerlate I've picked up a link."

"Pretty good if you have, for the best detectives are at fault all the time. Harlan told me the other day that the mystery is absolutely baffling."

"So dey all say," and the darkey street scout leaned toward his white friend and continued, but in a lower tone:

"I came from de ribber, jes' from de piers. I was down dar lookin' among de shipping fo' anything dat might turn up, an' somethin' did. I had jes' settled down on a lot of bales fo' a llttle rest when I heard voices near me, an' I saw two men standin' close to de stuff. You bet I was wide awake den, and by an' by I began to ketch a word or two, an' den my ears took in a good deal."

"And you heard something which leads you to believe that those men know something of the whereabouts of the lost Wall Street broker?"

"Dat's hit exactly. One o' dem was a tall, dudish-lookin' chap, jes' sech as you ketch strollin' through de parks o' evenin's. De odder was a smooth little fellar, with a mustache which he kept twistin' till I thought he wouldn't have a hair left for the glass. Dey was talkin' in low tones, but I managed to ketch a good deal. In de first place, dey said—de little moke started de idea—dat they was havin' a time keepin' de prize hid. He said dat all de coppers in town, to say nothin' of de specials, was after dem, an' dat if dey didn't soon pull de golden string de game would be up."

"But the name of the broker wasn't mentioned, Zip?"

"Not exactly, but de tall one remarked dat de reward wouldn't be increased for some few days, an' if dey could only hold out dat long, why, dey would take in de pot."

"That seems to show a good sign, Zip. I suspect you have struck a leader on the trail of the lost money king," said Toby.

"Jes' what I thought, an' when dey went off I jes' got in their tracks an' run 'em down."

"Good for you Zip!"

"Dey was slick as eels. Dey give me a long chase, but dey couldn't slip Zip Coppers."

"Well?"

"Dey first went to de new restaurant near de wharf, an' den, after supper, took another shot up inter de city. All

de time I was at their heels, and at last they pulled up in Pell street."

"Not a very nice quarter for two American citizens," observed Toby.

"Dat's all right; but mebbe dey ain't jes de right kind o' citizens," suggested the darkey. "You see, Toby, dey didn't jes' impress me as belongin' to de fo' hundred, but, on de contrary, dey looked a little tough under their vests."

"Wolves in sheep's clothing, Zip."

"Cert'ly. Dey was the biggest wolves I've seen since de las' menagerie. I left dem at home, an' dat's why I'm here," and Zip leaned back in the chair and looked at his friend.

"Here's de numbah," throwing upon the table near Toby a card upon which he had scribbled a few figures.

"Oh, it's near old Choo Lang's!" exclaimed Toby.

"Dat's wot! Don't you see! Those men have taken quarters dar to be in de swim wid Choo Lang an' his gang."

"There's something in that; and you remember, Zip, the time we had with this same Celestial when we were looking for little Maggie Donnelly last winter?"

Zip held out his hand and exhibited a scar on his dark wrist.

"De ole rat eater's autograf, as you call it," he said, with a grin. "I'm jes' waitin', Toby, fo' a chance to get back at 'im, an' mebbe de day o' jedgment's come at last."

For some time the two boys talked, but finally left the house together.

It was late, but no hour was ever too late for the detective pards.

New York had a new sensation—one which was giving the police and the detectives a good deal of trouble.

In brief, it was the disappearance of one of the most noted of the money dealers in Wall street.

Lincoln Lore—this was the man's name—had vanished in the twinkling of an eye, as it were—had left his office about closing time and had not been seen since.

He was reputed to be worth a million, and was noted for his shrewd operations among the bulls and bears of the famous locality.

He had dropped out of sight, if not out of existence, for not a single clew to his whereabouts had been obtained.

It was surmised that he had been carried off by some cool heads for ransom, but this idea had begun to be abandoned, and the police were almost ready to give up the hunt.

Lincoln Lore was a widower who lived up town with his only child, Lucy—a daughter just verging upon womanhood, and she had offered a reward of five thousand dollars for information leading to a solution of the Wall street mystery—hinting, further, that she was willing to double the amount, but, as yet, she had not done this.

No one knew that the broker had enemies; Miss Lucy, at least, did not, and she said that she thought her father the happiest man in the world.

These things only served to deepen the affair; and as the days passed the mystery seemed in increase in depth and darkness.

Half an hour after quitting the little room where Toby Tip lodged the boy pards turned into Pell street.

Zip led the way, and when near the corner he halted and caught Toby's sleeve.

"Dat's de tall one!" said he, in a half whisper, and the boy detective looked straight ahead.

Zip had pulled him into the shadows of a building, and was still calling his at-

tention to a man who stood on a step a few yards distant.

Toby saw, distinctly, a tall, well-dressed man.

"Dat's de tall bloke," continued Zip.

Hugging the building, the two spies continued their watch, and presently the man came down the steps and toward them.

"Shall we cut dirt?" asked the darkey.

"No, hug this wall and take the chances," was the reply. "He can't do more than see us. Down with your cap, Zip. There, that's O. K. Now let him come."

The shadowed advanced without appearing to suspect that he was watched.

They saw his face as he passed and noticed that it was rather handsome, though bearing marks of a fast life.

He passed so close that the ferrets might have touched him.

"Hit was a close shave, eh, Toby?" observed Zip, when they had the man's back for inspection.

"Rather, Zip. But, come; we don't want to lose that man. I've seen him before, and if I'm not mistaken, he is worth his weight in gold to us. You've made a ten strike to-night, Zip. You've found an important clew. Come, don't let us lose sight of Nobby Nick Noggles, for that is he, sure!"

"Jupiter! wot a name," grinned Zip, following Toby.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT NOBBY NICK DID.

It was evident that Zip, though well acquainted with the sports of the town, did not know Nobby Nick Noggles.

The man was somewhat of a dandy, in certain quarters, and was, moreover, well known to the police.

He was a tall young fellow, of twenty-five, with a good figure, which sometimes was to be seen on Broadway attired in the best of tailor-made toggery, and nearly always with a high-priced cigar between his teeth.

Toby had not only seen this fellow a great deal, but knew something about him.

On one occasion, not connected with the story in hand—the mysterious vanishing of Lincoln Lore—he had caught the young sport in a rascally trick, and this had caused him to keep him in mind.

Therefore, when he found him in Pell street, he desired to keep him in sight, inasmuch as Zip had tracked him from the wharf to the place.

Nick, smoking and seemingly at peace with all the world, strolled down the street to the nearest corner, where he stopped to talk for a moment with a fat little Chinaman, against whom he had almost run.

"Choo Lang's little Mercury!" remarked Toby, with a nudge which Zip understood. "That's the same little almond-eyed heathen who grabbed you in the alley that night, Zip."

"Dat's de yaller bloke," asserted the colored boy, with a grimace. "I'd jes' give my head to have him in dat same alley for a minute, Toby. Time will come for dat, or my name's not Zip Coppers!"

By this time Nobby Nick had passed on and the Chinaman had also moved on his way.

"He's going toward the river," muttered the white boy. "We'll go back over your old trail, Zip."

"Mebbe to de same pier."

"Likely. There, he turns the other corner and has thrown his snipe away."

Nick had tossed the remains of his cigar into the gutter and was walking a little faster.

The boys kept him in sight and soon saw that he was making for the river.

He did not look behind him, as if confident that he was not shadowed, and at last was seen to stand on the pier with his face turned toward a vessel lying in its dock.

This vessel was one of many which ply between New York and Liverpool, and the boys with their keen eyes could see the name which was in large black letters, and seemed to stand out on the wood.

It was "The Strongbow."

Nobby Nick walked closer to the edge of the pier, and all at once gave vent to a low whistle.

"Dat's a signal," said Zip.

Soon a second person appeared upon the wharf, and he immediately approached Noggles, who was then seen to hand the other something, which was eagerly taken.

"How goes it?" asked Nick.

"All O. K. Couldn't go better."

"Nothing's suspected yet?"

"Not a thing."

"And you're good for a week here, yet?"

"We can make it two if necessary. You know ship repairs are slow sometimes."

Both men laughed at this, and then Nick said:

"Don't let anything scare you. Something may turn up of a worrying nature, but in the end all will be right."

"We're not easily frightened, and I've been in the world long enough to take things coolly."

"I thought so."

"When you frustrate old Jack Donnard just let me know, will you?" continued the man who spoke like a sailor. "The Strongbow's the best trap for your purpose you ever heard of, but you know this already."

"It's all right. Now I'll go back. Keep your eyes open, Jack."

"Aye, aye, sir!" was the reply, as the speaker touched his hat and drew back.

Nick ran one hand into the depths of his pocket and pulled out some coin, which the sailor took eagerly.

"Good night, Jack!" said he.

"Good night."

Once more Nobby Nick was on the move from the pier, and the boy shadowers who had observed and listened from a secreted spot eyed him as keenly as ever.

"Shall we let 'im go?" asked Zip.

"Not yet. The ship won't fly away. It's good for a week here; you heard Jack Donnard say as much. We must see what becomes of Nick Noggles."

Once more the dandy crook led the way, and the two boys continued at his heels until he turned into a short, narrow street, which would lead him to Wall.

The man kept on, and at length turned into the famous thoroughfare

He did not stop until he came out in front of Old Trinity, and as he crossed the street Zip observed that he was going to look for a ghost in the old burying ground.

But, all at once, a man rose from the fence in front, and the next moment had joined Nick.

The two men then walked slowly up Broadway, close together, and keenly watched by the two young spotters.

Suddenly they stopped, and Nick turned on his companion with an oath.

"Don't say that again!" the boys heard him say.

"I will if I care to!" was the defiant reply. "Ain't I my own boss, and haven't I a right to express my opinion?"

"But it's an insult to me. I say you must keep such words back or—"

The two men were standing face to face, and the boys saw that Nick's hands were tightly clenched.

"I'll turn you off now without a penny!" he cried.

"Try it!" retorted the other. "Just carry out that threat if you think you can afford to."

No reply was made to these words for a moment, and while Toby and Zip waited in the shadow of a doorway for the denouement they wondered who the second man was.

"You can't win both the reward and the girl," reminded Nick's companion.

"I can, and will, if you keep your mouth shut."

"I can tell you now that you have your hands full. It's the boldest game ever played in this city of bold schemes and—"

"Hush! Here comes some one."

Nick looked up the street and caught sight of a solitary figure moving down upon them.

The other did not speak again and the pedestrian passed them.

"Now I'll talk," blurted Nick's friend. "You can't threaten me with dismissal, knowing what I know. You can't let me go at this stage of the game without a dollar for the risk I've taken."

"Shame upon you! What did I take you out of the gutter of poverty for? To have you betray us? To become the victim of your base ingratitude?"

"That's all right, but I simply wanted to say that I've got some manhood left, and that when you calculate to blight the life of as sweet a girl as this city shelters you may count without your hosts."

"She's smitten you, has she?" cried the dandy crook.

"That's not true. I never spoke to—"

"There, you needn't mention her name here. The winds carry words into strange places. What if we were overheard?"

"I wouldn't more than half care if we were."

"No, for you haven't got much to lose. See here, Boston, you must keep your mouth shut."

"That's a command, eh?"

"Curse you, it's nothing else—a command which must be obeyed! I won't have it otherwise."

Boston, not so tall nor as old as the dandy, backed off, but the hand of Noggles gripped his shoulder.

"See here! You don't know me yet!" he cried. "I'm more lion than man. I'm a terrible fellow when I'm roused. It must be silence from this time on—silence and obedience, or it will be death!"

The last word was fairly hissed from between closed lips, and the boy detectives heard it in wonder.

Boston could not get away.

"What will you do?—keep silence or feel the hand of the man-tiger of New York?" Nick demanded.

The listeners could not make out the reply, but all at once the younger man was jerked into the narrow street near at hand, and Nick seemed to drag him away.

Should the ferrets follow? They did not decide for a few moments; then they advanced along the walk the crook had taken—advanced very cautiously, not to be caught off guard, in that lonely thoroughfare.

For two minutes or more they slid along the walk like shadows; they neared, then crossed, Church street; when, soon after, Zip ran against something—the body of a man, on the stones.

At once both boys bent over the prostrate figure.

"This is the man Boston," said Toby, as he held a match close to the face of the fallen one. "He's alive, Zip! See! he's been thumped as with a sledge. We're on the right track at last. It'll be the softest snap we've had in a long while. What's that he's saying? Listen!"

The lips of the young man were moving, and Toby, who put his ears close, heard him utter the name of Lucy Lore—then all was still.

The little match went out.

CHAPTER III.

A BIRD IN THE HAND.

But the boys waited, and were rejoiced to find the young man's senses returning. In a little while he so revived that, with the aid of the street scouts he got upon his feet.

He had lost his hat, and there was some blood on his face, but he seemed to notice his surroundings quite well.

But he did not quite understand the presence of the boys, for he asked:

"Where am I, anyhow?"

Tip told him.

"Oh, yes, I recollect now."

"Your friend struck you, didn't he?" Boston started.

"My friend?" said he, with a smile.

"You don't think one friend would strike another, eh?"

"Well, no. I'll take that back; it was Noggles who hit you."

"Do you know him?"

"I've seen the man."

"Don't let your acquaintance with him get any further," and the hand of the speaker fell lightly upon Toby's shoulder.

"He's a little dangerous."

"Your speak from experience, I suppose?"

Boston smiled.

"Perhaps," said he; "but I don't want to say anything against him just now. See?"

With this he started off, but the boys kept at his side.

It was evident that the young man wanted to shake them, but Toby was determined not to be shaken; he wanted a little more acquaintance with Noggles' pard.

"You ought to wash up a little," suggested Toby.

Boston looked at his clothes and saw that they were dirty, and that his hands needed cleaning.

"I guess I will," said he.

"Then right this way. I'll show you where you can clean up and not be molested."

For a moment Boston appeared about to refuse the proffered service, but he went off with the two friends, and Toby guided him to his own home.

"Here's where I live," he explained, as he ushered the young man into his plain room. "It's not a palace like the Vanderbilts', but it's good enough for Toby Tip."

"Is that your name?"

"That's what they call me."

Boston, who had already taken off his coat, stared at the youthful ferret, and then threw a quick glance toward the door where Zip stood.

"And who is that?" he asked.

"It's Zip—my friend Zip."

"Oh, I see. You're the shadowers known as the dock detectives?"

Both boys smiled.

"Who told you?"

"Never mind that—I know."

Boston went to the washstand, and at a wave of Toby's hand, Zip, with a knowing look withdrew.

Toby did not say anything while Boston performed his ablutions and when the young man had wiped his face and once more looked presentable he took a seat.

"Did you boys see the fracas?" he asked.

"A part of it. We didn't see the knockdown, but we got to you as soon as possible."

"You heard us, then, talking on Broadway?"

"Yes; we heard and saw what occurred there."

For a moment Boston was silent.

"My name is Bland," said he. "I came from Massachusetts, and that's how I came to get my front name. I have been in this city for three years, and fate threw me into the hands of the man who turned on me and struck me to the ground."

"I don't intend to peach on him, although I ought to do it. I am in a measure tied to him, but I can't now tell you what I know about Nick Noggles. He isn't just the nicest kind of a man to know, for he is one who can carry out the slickest schemes you ever heard of."

"I happen to know something about him," informed Toby. "I know a little something about 'Nobby Nick,' as he is called in certain quarters. He's got a big scheme on hand now, hasn't he?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," answered Boston, ambiguously. "But, you see, I can't peach on him."

"You threatened to do so to-night."

"I know I did. He made me hot, and I said some things to him I wouldn't repeat."

"I see. You fear the man."

"That is true. I fear him," and Boston Bland for a moment averted his face.

"Don't you know that you would have the protection of the law if you were to come out and boldly expose his schemes?"

"I know that, too, but life is the dearest thing man has."

Toby looked at the white face of the man in the chair before him.

"Isn't it about the Lincoln Lore mystery?" he asked.

With a quick start Boston looked at the boy sharply, and yet in evident fear.

"I can't tell you anything," said Boston, rising. "I am oath-bound in this matter."

"But you know a good deal."

"There, by Jove! you must not tempt me," was replied, with a little laugh. "I must go. Many thanks for your kindness, boy. You are sharp, very sharp, they tell me; but you must look out this time."

"I think I understand, sir. But, Mr. Bland, you must know that I am on the trail to stay; that is my way."

There was no reply, and in another moment Boston Bland had quitted the house.

"That man knows a good deal," decided Toby. "He is in the swim, but would like to get out of it. He fears Nobby Nick and the others, for others there must be in the deal. I will see him later," and with this the boy detective stepped to the window and looked down into the street.

The light of the nearest lamp fell upon the pavement, and he saw Boston Bland emerge on the walk below—saw him look cautiously about him, and then, pulling his hat over his brows, he started off, walking rapidly toward the river.

But a few moments passed; then there was a shadower at his heels.

Zip, the little yellow skin, had been

dismissed by Toby for the very purpose.

"Wen you catch dis chile nappin' jes' drop him a postal," observed the darky, as he kept Boston in sight. "Wot's de use tryin' to beat Zip Coppers? You can't do dat, Bosting—not to-night. I se on dis lay, big, you bet!"

Boston kept straight on toward the river, and then down on the pier—Zip not a dozen yards in his rear, when—

From behind a stack of bales on the pier a figure rose right in front of the boy tracker.

"Here, you young rat! What are you doing here?" and, as the man spoke, he seized Zip by the arm with a grip like a vise.

"Why don't you answer me?" demanded the stranger.

"Hit's none of your business! Let me go!" cried the spotter.

"None of my business, eh? I'll show you it is my business. Come along! I'll introduce you to a little treatment which may open your mouth. I'll see what you are down here for to-night and who you're serving."

The yellow boy was dragged across the pier to the water's edge.

A small boat was bobbing on the river below, and without a moment's delay Zip was hustled over the fringe of the planks.

"Down into the boat!" ordered the man, and the prisoner was literally dropped down after him, and as the little craft was pushed from the pier the captor took up the oars and hissed in Zip's ears:

"Not a word now! Silence is golden!"

The ferret looked into the face of his enemy and realized, in an instant, that it was a cruel one—that defiance might mean sudden death.

"I'll see wot comes o' dis adventure," he decided, wisely. "I may be right in it, who knows? Am I goin' over ter Jersey? No, we're turnin' down among de vessels at the piers, an' mebbe I'll see de insides o' de Strongbow."

Then Zip settled back in the boat and awaited events.

CHAPTER IV.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

Toby Tip waited a long time for Zip's return, but the night wore away without bringing the yellow ferret.

The first thing Toby did in the morning was to seek the boy's lodgings in hopes of finding him sleeping off the fatigue of the past night's work, but the bed had not been tumbled, and he turned away disappointed.

"I'll look along the docks," he decided, "and while there will take a look at the Strongbow."

Already there was a good deal of life along the water front, and the boy detective, slipping along the docks, looked carefully at everybody he met.

In a short time he came to the Strongbow's berth, and saw the old ship lying quietly, with but little sign of life about her.

Toby was studying her and thinking of what Zip had heard and seen between Nick Noggles and the sailor called Jack Connard, when he was confronted by a large, rough-looking man, who carried a piece of tarred rope in one hand.

"Jack Connard himself!" assumed Toby, recognizing him by Zip's description.

The sailor's face was aflame with indignation, but Toby stood his ground and waited for the opening of the battle.

"What yer want here? What's this craft to you?" demanded Connard, in ugly mood.

"What's that to you? Are you her master?" demanded the boy.

"I'll show you!" was replied, and Jack held the rope up threateningly.

"That's the Strongbow, isn't it?"

"Can't you read? Look at the name yonder. You are a dock-rat-spy; that I know. So git out o' the way or I'll leave my autograf on your face."

Toby drew back defiantly.

"It's a game two might play at," he warned. "You have no right to order me away. The docks and piers of New York are not private property, and I'll walk them as long as I please; understand that, Jack Connard!"

"Where did you git that name?"

"Never mind. It fits you, don't it?"

Big Jack bit his lip. "You little ten-center!" he cried; "I'll just chuck you overboard!" and he reached for the boy.

But Toby slipped dexterously from his grasp, and from a short distance laughed at the man's discomfiture. Then he looked once more toward the ship, to behold a man leaning over the railing, evidently taking an interest in what was happening on the pier.

Toby thought the figure looked familiar, and then recognized Nick Noggles!

A shrill whistle came from this man on deck, at which signal Connard looked over his shoulder, then turned and walked toward the edge of the pier and left Toby to himself.

Almost at the same moment the face on deck disappeared, and the big sailor let himself over the wharf and vanished.

"That was Nobby Noggles," said the boy ferret to himself. "He is on board the Strongbow, and evidently came down to her last night."

Toby quietly withdrew, but in a few moments had dodged into a small restaurant near by, where one of his pards served as a waiter.

"Hello, Toby!" cried a boy with a white apron on, as he entered the place.

Toby returned the salutation, calling the boy "Teazer." The next moment both lads had entered a little room at the end of the restaurant.

"Can I have your bedroom, overhead, for a spell, Teazer?" eagerly asked Toby.

"Certainly. You know how to get there."

Toby sprang to a flight of steps, and in a short time stood at a window from which he could plainly see across the street and down the pier and get a good view of the Strongbow's deck.

It was a capital place for observation, and the boy detective sat down and kept his gaze riveted upon the suspect ship.

He was alone in his pard's room, and had locked the door behind him, so as not to be molested during his vigil, and in a moment he had forgotten everything except the business in hand.

For a little while he saw nothing that looked suspicious, but, all at once, he noticed two men on the upper deck.

The distance was not too great to prevent his making them out, and he knew that they were Jack Connard and Dandy Nick Noggles.

They appeared to be engaged in close conversation, and for some time they stood close together and talked, as Toby could see, in earnest tones.

"Birds of a feather," muttered the watcher at the window.

In a little while he saw Nick leave the vessel, appear on the wharf, and then proceed to cross the street to the restaurant, which he entered.

"What brings the rascal here?" queried Toby. "Does he suspect that I am in this room and on the watch?"

He sprang across the room and put his ear at the door, opening at the head of the stairway.

In a second he heard Teazer's voice talking to some one in the room below.

"Now, don't try to deceive me," said Nobby Nick to the young waiter. "He's somewhere in the house."

"Don't you believe me?" angrily demanded Teazer, who, as we have stated, was a tried pard of the boy detective.

"No, I don't. You're birds of the same feather, and if I catch you entering into a game against a gentleman I'll report you to the manager, and you'll get your walking papers."

"Report and be hanged! What do you want with the person you're inquiring for?"

"That's my business."

"Perhaps it is, but I don't betray my friends. See here! I've seen you before, and down here after dark, too. Don't you know, sir, that it isn't nice for a gentleman to be sneaking along the piers with such fellows as Jack Connard?"

"You never saw me here after dark."

"I have! Only three nights ago you came in here and got a bowl of soup and lost your handkerchief with your name in one corner. Oh, my, how it was perfumed!"

"You little wretch, where is it?" cried the alarmed Nick. "Hand it here, and I'll see if it is mine."

Teazer evidently retreated to the table in the room and took a handkerchief from the drawer, for Toby heard Nick exclaim that it was not his.

"But you dropped it," cried Teazer. "I picked it up under your table. It's your property, and you can have it, sir."

"I hope he won't take it," thought Toby. "I want that handkerchief myself."

"You'll take it, eh?" cried Teazer. "All right. Well, the boy you want to see isn't in the house now. He came in, I'll say that; but he went out, and you'll have to look elsewhere for him."

Then Toby, listening at the head of the stairway, heard Nick move away, and in another moment the triumphant face of Teazer appeared at the door.

"Did you hear me give the bloke that game of wind? It was the man who left the handkerchief in the restaurant a few nights since. He came in disguised, but he dropped it on the floor, and the moment I spied it I knew he was no common bird, if he was in poor plumage."

"He was looking for me, was he?"

"Yes; said you had come here, and he wanted to find you. It took a little fibbing, but I guess I got the best o' him."

"He got his property back, though. I wish you could have kept the handkerchief."

"Why, here it is!"

Teazer held out a silk handkerchief, and Toby took it with a look of amazement in his eyes.

"I thought you gave it back to him, Teazer?"

"I did, but as he turned away I flipped it from his pocket—a little trick I learned last year from Swiper. Ha, ha, Toby! It takes a daisy to get the best of Teazer, your old pard. Look at the name in the corner—'Nick Noggles!' Doesn't that give the bird away?"

CHAPTER V.

TOBY MAKES A CALL.

One place the dock detective had not visited since taking the trail of the Lincoln Lore mystery, as the disappearance of the wealthy broker was called, and that was the home of the missing man; but to this home, after the restaurant adventure, Toby betook himself.

The broker, being a man of great wealth and much of a power on Wall Street, his vanishment created a great excitement, and the office had been besieged since the event by hundreds of inquiring friends.

A short time after quitting the restaurant Toby was at the house front door, waiting for a reply to his ring.

The door was opened by a maid in neat attire, and he was ushered into the reception room, after asking for "Miss Lucy."

In a little while she came in, and the boy detective then beheld a willowy miss of twenty, with black, expressive eyes and good carriage.

Her face wore a sorrowful and troubled look.

"You are Miss Lucy, I believe?" asked the boy caller.

"I am Lucy Lore," was the reply.

"I have called to ask a few questions concerning your father—"

"You may have seen my story in the newspapers?" she interrupted.

"I've seen that, but—"

"Well, I can't say that I have anything to add to it."

"All right, Miss, but I thought you might have a little information for us in another direction."

"For us?" repeated the girl.

"Yes, miss—for Toby Tip & Co."

"Then you are in business of some kind?"

"They call us the Dock Ferrets. Just now Zip is off on a trail connected with your father's disappearance, and I am here to question you a little if you will kindly permit it."

Lucy, who had taken a chair near the table, watched the boy for a moment and then replied:

"You can proceed. If I can enlighten you in any way I will gladly do it."

"In the first place, I believe you said your father had a visitor the night before he vanished?"

"That is true."

"You did not see this visitor?"

"Only the merest glimpse."

"Not enough for you to recognize him if you should see him again?"

"I can't say as to that. I got, as I have just said, a glance at him, but glance though it was, I saw a good deal of him."

"His face, miss?"

"No, not that, but the general shape of him and his garments. He came to the house that night shortly after father had come home, and they were closeted together for nearly an hour."

"And you?"

"I remained in the parlor, while they talked in the library across the hall. I did not try to ascertain what they were talking about, for father has had many callers, and when they came out of the room, the door yonder stood slightly ajar, and then I got my glimpse of him."

Lucy proceeded to tell what she had seen of the caller, the boy listening attentively, and at the close of her description he said:

"That man ought to be found. You have told this to the police, I suppose?"

"I have, and the best detectives in the city have taken up the clue."

Toby was thoughtful a moment.

"You haven't seen that man since?" he suddenly asked.

The broker's daughter started.

"I won't say that I have not. Last night as I was coming home—I had walked out a little—I was suddenly confronted by a man whose general appearance made me start."

"The same man, miss?"

"I won't say. It was after dark, you see, and under the lamps. I cannot say he was the same man, for I cannot believe he would have any designs against my father."

"Oh, you know him, then?"

"I have known him for some time."

"A friend, miss?"

"An acquaintance of my father's," answered Lucy, quickly. "You see, I am a young lady without a very extensive acquaintance—I have no regular callers—and that is why I cannot say that the gentleman I saw last night is a friend of mine."

"You were frightened, I suppose?"

"Not exactly that. I was startled by the resemblance he bore to the man who came out of the library the night before papa's disappearance. His name is Noggles—I cannot tell you his first name." "Nicholas Noggles, eh, miss?"

"Really, I do not know. You may know the man?"

Toby did not reply, but looked seriously, sober and thoughtful.

He rose to quit the room, when the white hand of Miss Lore fell softly upon his arm.

"I already have offered the sum of five thousand dollars for my father, and I stand ready to increase it to ten."

"So I've heard," said Toby.

"Do you think I had best do it?"

The boy detective thought a moment, and, looking up into her face, said:

"It might be the proper thing to do. It will stir up the specials, and they will work more diligently."

"I had thought of that. Indeed, I have been advised to increase the reward."

"By the detectives?"

"Partly so; but let me show you."

She picked up a letter lying on the table and took from the envelope a bit of paper, which she handed to Toby.

"That's the last letter of advice to come in," she said, with a smile. "It came this very day."

Toby took the paper and went nearer the light.

In another moment he had read:

"Miss Lucy Lore:

"My opinion is that an increase of the reward to \$10,000 will have the desired results and will speedily bring about your father's return. I advise this from what I have known of similar cases, and would therefore earnestly advise you to increase the reward at once and publicly proclaim it. Very truly yours,

"A Friend."

"Let me see the envelope, please," Toby requested.

It was placed in his hand, and he looked at the stamp.

"It's a city letter, I see, Miss."

"Yes, it came from some one in New York."

"Mailed at one of the up-town stations."

"That is true."

The boy held both the letter and the envelope in his hand and smiled:

"Would you let me keep these a little while, Miss?"

"Certainly, if you care to. I am willing to do anything that will assist you in your hunt for father. I cannot think from whom the letter can have come, but it seems to be written by a friend who has our welfare at heart."

"Or your ruin," thought the boy special, but just then he did not care to express himself.

With the letter in his pocket, he bowed himself out of the house, and in a short time was on a car going down town. There was a puzzled expression

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on his face, but now and then it seemed to vanish, as if he was getting to the bottom of the mystery.

He did not find any traces of Zip at either the old nest or his own rooms, and this absence seemed to puzzle Toby.

What had become of his darky chum?

As he came out of Zip's quarters he almost ran against a man who avoided him and struck a fast gait from the vicinity.

"Why, that's Jack Connard, the sailor! I can tell by his shoulders and his walk. What brings him up into the city, and in that sort of toggery?"

In a little while the boy ferret was after him, and the man thus discovered more than ever convinced him that it was Jack himself, and he wondered again what had brought the fellow from the Strongbow.

Was he watching Zip's home, or had he merely happened in the vicinity in time to be seen by Toby?

It did not take long for Toby to track the sailor down, for Jack dodged into a small chop-house and took a table in the last row.

Presently he was joined by a man whom Toby recognized as Dandy Nick Noggles, and the two at once put their heads together.

"Something's gone wrong with the city vultures," assumed Toby; "they're here for consultation, and the chances are that the broker's case is under consideration. I must find out."

He waited until the pair left the place, which they did in a short time, and, after walking a short way down the street, were seen to separate.

"I'll try Jack," thought Toby, taking after the burly sailor of the Strongbow.

He was led a long chase, the man stopping in at several places before he turned to the water front, but looking in at the restaurant where Teazer worked before he crossed over to the pier.

Toby waited so long for his reappearance that he grew restless and resolved to see what Jack was doing.

As he entered the eating house he caught sight of the stalwart figure of the mate at the counter, and Teazer tipped him a wink to be cautious.

But the keen eyes of Jack Connard intercepted the signal, and the next moment he had whirled upon the boy detective.

He knew Toby on sight.

"Come here!" he commanded.

Toby's eyes flashed.

"You won't, eh?" cried Jack, and the next moment he sprang forward as nimbly as a cat and grasped the boy's arm.

"I'll shake you to pieces, you little spy!" he hissed. "I've a mind to do it right here; should have done it on the pier, but this is just as good a place."

Toby drew back the length of that muscular arm and defiantly looked Jack in the eye.

CHAPTER VI.

ZIP COPPERS IN THE OLD TRAP.
Meantime Zip, the darky detective, was having some adventures of his own.

We left him in a boat with a man who appeared to be taking him to some vessel lying in its dock—wholly at the mercy of the ruffian who had captured him on the pier.

Zip concluded not to make an attempt to escape, hoping by remaining quiet to see more of his enemy and learn the causes which led to his capture.

Sure enough, he was rowed to a ship in dock, which he discovered to be the Strongbow, and in a little while he stood on its deck.

But he was not given much time for thought, for he was quickly hustled below.

The heart of the old ship was dark and gloomy, and the crib in which Zip found himself was small and foul smelling, and he soon discovered that he was cooped up like a rat in a trap, and a death-trap at that.

"Dis yer looks like business," said Zip to himself. "I'm of de 'pinion dat I'm right in de innards ob de whale dat Jonah explored," and he laughed at the suggestion.

Zip always looked on the humorous side of things, and his laugh must have been heard, for a sudden thumping on the wall near which he stood was heard.

"Dry up, there! Let a man sleep, won't you?"

"Wot, can't you sleep?" queried Zip.

"Of course I can't, with you cackling in there."

"Den go to de Fifth Avenue or de Waldorf!"

"Stop your jabber and let me go to sleep, or I'll know the reason why."

"Well, you can't come in yer to stop me. Guess I'll dance a jig or sing a song to keep up my spirits and amuse you."

"If you do I'll murder you!"

"Dat's mighty 'couragin'. Whar's yer graveyard, mister?"

The man beyond the partition thereupon grew furious, and his imprecations rather amused than frightened the irrepressible lad.

"Who are you, anyhow?" suddenly asked the irate man.

"I might make de same inquiry."

"Of course. That would be fair. I'm Captain Sellers, of this ship, and I'm laid up here after a fall in the city."

"I beg yer pawdon, Cap'n," put in Zip. "I don't want ter disturb yer sleep, so you kin go back to yer bunk. I'm Zip Coppers, an' I was brought here against my will, you can bet on dat!"

"Who fetched you aboard?"

"Dat's wot I don't exactly know."

"Where do you belong?"

"In de city, of course. I was on de pier when I was cotched an' toted on board dis ship."

"That's funny," said the captain of the Strongbow. "I don't understand it."

"Then give orders fo' dem to let dis nigger go."

"I'll see to that."

"When, Cap'n?"

"In the morning."

"All right."

Zip found a bunk on one side of the "stateroom," and in a little while, making the best of the situation, he was lying in it ready to court sleep.

He wondered if the captain of the Strongbow would keep his promise to look after his case in the morning, and by and by all sounds seemed to grow still, and he slept.

How long his first slumber lasted he did not know, for all at once he found himself sitting bolt upright in the narrow bunk.

He seemed to have been wakened by a sound of some kind, and now he listened for its repetition.

It was heard again, and the darky detective knew that he was not alone in that little room.

All was dark, but he fancied he could see some one near the door.

Zip remained quiet, and presently he heard a step upon the floor.

It was a soft tread, but his keen ears caught the sound, and he wondered what was to happen.

A moment more, and a hand fell upon

his body and then began to feel for his face.

Zip, who had fallen back upon the pillow, did not stir, and hardly breathed. At last his face was found by the hand, and he felt it very softly pass over it.

The person in the cabin evidently believed that the darky ferret was sound asleep, for he soon drew back and struck a light near the door.

Now Zip saw his visitor.

As the flame flared up he caught sight of a well-built figure and saw a bronzed and cruel face.

The man stole a glance toward the bunk and then came forward with a small lantern in his hand.

"Wot you want?" cried the boy, sitting up again, and so suddenly that the fellow stopped and gasped as if he had been confronted by a ghost.

"Wot you want here, I say?" repeated the boy.

"I want you!" was the cry, as the man sprang to the bunk.

The agile darky leaped from the bunk and stood on the floor facing the man with the light.

They looked at one another a moment in amazement, and then Zip said:

"You're here fo' no good, mister. They've sent you down here ter finish Zip Coppers."

"What if they have?" was the growling reply. "What if I am to be executioner? I have you foul, boy, and you can't get away from my hands."

Zip looked at the door, but it was closed, and he doubted not that it was locked.

Then he thought of the Strongbow's captain beyond the wall, but he heard no sounds in that direction now.

"Oh, you're shut in like a rat in a trap!" laughed the man, with a merciless grin. "You can't git out no way you can fix it."

Zip's blood seemed to boil at this.

"In a few minutes you'll be food for the fishes. You will see what's at the bottom of the river, for dead boys tell no tales, you know."

The man as he spoke made a step toward Zip, but the boy dodged him, and he missed him by an inch.

This angered the fellow, and he darted after Zip, who suddenly caught up a stick standing against the wall and placed himself on the defensive.

"Don't touch me!" he cried.

"Down with that stick!"

"You'll go down fust. Stand back or take de consequences!"

Quick as thought the stick came down upon the outstretched arm, but it was dashed aside, though the blow drew a cry of pain from the man.

"Might as well foller up de victory," thought Zip, and springing forward he struck again and again, driving his enemy into a corner, where for a little while he was at the mercy of the war-club.

Suddenly Zip leaned back and threw himself against the door.

It would not yield.

"Ha! shut in like a rat!" came from the man across the cabin, and a harsh laugh followed.

Zip was not discouraged, for all at once he heard voices beyond the door, and some one demanded to know what was happening in there.

"Don't open the door, Perry," cried the boy's assailant.

This command was not obeyed or else not understood, for the door was swung open, and Zip sprang out and darted toward the companion-way.

He nearly overturned some one in his flight, and he heard behind him the loud voice of the man who had attacked him.

"Stop him, Perry, stop him!"

But the nimble-footed boy was then half way to the deck.

"Don't let him get off, Perry!" cried the voice in his rear. "Stop him if you have to kill the little rat!"

But Zip had gained the deck.

"Catch him! Catch the boy!"

Zip gained the railing, but something then struck him in the back, and he felt himself sinking to the deck.

"That time you got him, Perry!"

"Not yet," thought Zip, and the following moment he managed to throw himself over the bulwarks!

"That ends him," said a voice overhead. "He's gone down between the ship and the stringpiece."

This was true. Toby's yellow pard had dropped between the side of the Strongbow and the pier piles and had vanished in the water!

Two men leaned over the ship's side and looked down.

Their faces were dark and brutal in expression, and they laughed as they turned away.

"I'd have finished him in the cabin if you hadn't come, Perry, but it's all right as it is. The Harbor Patrol even won't find him."

Another laugh followed, and the men vanished, leaving Zip Coppers to his fate.

CHAPTER VII.

A CLOSE CALL FOR TOBY.

Jack Connard of the Strongbow found that he had his hands full.

Teazer showed signs of coming to Toby's rescue with an ugly-looking piece of iron, so the mate wisely let the boy detective go, uttering a dire threat of future vengeance as he left the restaurant.

"Anything new?" eagerly asked the young ferret.

"Can't say that there is. Haven't found the last nabob yet, I opine?"

"Not yet, pard, but I think I'm on the right track, and if I have good luck I'll land my game."

"What brings Nobby Dick down here so often? That's what I'd like to know. He comes in all sorts of disguises, but he can't disguise his walk, and that's what gives him away whenever he comes. He seems to be interested in the ship over there in the slip, the Strongbow, Captain Sellers, for he goes to her pretty often."

"When did he begin going there, Teazer?"

"About ten days ago."

"Can you name the date precisely?"

"I can by an entry in my diary."

The boy went up to his room and came back with the book, opening it at a certain page.

"I can find the time in another entry, for I remember making it when I first saw Noggles talking with Jack Connard in the back room of this restaurant."

"That'll do."

It did not take the young detective long to find the date.

"It was the morning of the ninth, Toby," said he.

"The ninth? Why, that's the very day the broker vanished!"

"I didn't make any note of that event, but you ought to know. I only know that on that day I first saw Nick Noggles and Jack Connard together."

"When did you see him next?"

"Why, late that night. He dropped in here for a light for his cigar, and nearly

every day since I've seen him hereabouts."

"I don't suppose you saw anything suspicious on the pier the night of the ninth?"

"Can't say that I did."

"And nothing very suspicious since?"

"No."

"Do you know Captain Sellers of the Strongbow?"

"Slightly. He had a fall the other day and hurt himself pretty badly. A little too much barleycorn, I guess."

"Where is he now?—at the hospital?"

"No, he wouldn't let them take him there, but insisted on being taken to his vessel, where he now is?"

"What sort of man is he?"

"A queer chap. You never seem to get acquainted with him. I only know him by frequent sight, and that's about all the acquaintance I want with Captain Sellers."

"A dangerous man, Teazer?"

"He looks like it, and yet I've known him to be kind to a forlorn kitten which had been abandoned on the street."

"He's got some good traits in him, then," said Toby.

"So has a tiger."

The rest of the day Toby spent waiting for Zip to turn up, and trying to strike the well-covered trail of the lost broker.

Once more night spread her sable curtain over the city, and the lamps flashed out in the gathering gloom.

From a secluded spot the boy shadower watched the dark outlines of the Strongbow, as if the true solution of the mystery lay below her decks.

He saw people leave her and come ashore, which was but a few steps, as the Strongbow lay snug drawn to the pier, and these people he eyed with all his keenness.

He longed to be on board the vessel himself, and at last he resolved to make the attempt; to decide was to act, and in ten minutes time he dropped like a cat upon her deck, quite unobserved.

That was a lucky beginning, and instantly stealing overdeck to the cabin coping, he dropped to the deck close under the lee of it, near the companionway—to spy, to see, to hear.

If he could escape being seen all might be well, but, if discovered there by Jack Connard or his friends, he would have a fight for his own safety—perhaps for his life; but, believing that the real clew of the trail lay within the old vessel he resolved to run all risks to discover what the Strongbow could reveal.

Hardly had he nestled down by the coping when some one stole up from below.

It was Nick Noggles, as Toby quickly ascertained.

"Wait a moment," said a voice below, and Nick stood still and waited.

"What is it, Jack?" he asked.

"I wanted to hand you this," and Jack Connard, coming up the companionway, handed Nick a little flat package.

"You know how to use that if necessity compels," Jack remarked, in low tones.

"I understand, Jack," Noggles passed over the plank to the pier.

Jack also at once vanished, and by and by the boy detective decided to slip on a voyage of discovery.

He was well acquainted with the interior of vessels, having passed his life among them and the docks, and he knew how to proceed. Down the companionway he slipped, but not into the cabin. He turned into the hold passage, and at once was midships, just forward of the

cabin where he could hear what was going on within.

But a moment passed when he heard voices.

The boy ferret started. Two men were advancing between him and the companionway.

"Who saw him come on board?" one asked.

"Dick saw him on the plank, and the next minute he couldn't see him, which means that he came on board."

Were they looking for him?

Toby held his breath.

He was in a place where he was likely to be seen if the men searched with a light.

"It's pretty dark down here. Strike a light, Jim."

"Wait till I find my matches."

Toby thought the jig was up.

In another moment a match would be struck and he would be found!

"Come. Don't let's fool away much time down here. I don't take any stock in Dick's yarn, you see. Where's yer match?"

"I haven't got one. I'll have to go to my bunk for them."

Both men retreated and Toby breathed freer, and he at once made his way further along in the hold and struck an open box, which proved to be empty. Under this he crawled and pulled it down over him.

Hardly was he thus ensconced when he heard voices again, and saw the glimmer of a light along the floor.

Around the halo the men tramped, but seeing nothing of interest to them, soon were ready to leave.

"Come. We'll go ashore to the little restaurant and try its soup."

"All right; shore it is, for we're off duty now."

Toby listened with joy to the sound of vanishing steps.

In another minute he was once more on deck of the Strongbow, looking over the top lights of what might be termed an after-cabin upon the strangest sight he had ever seen below a liner's decks.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SLIP TWIXT CUP AND LIP.

The place was well furnished, and the person reclined on a sofa, with his hands over his face.

Toby could see that the man was well dressed, after the manner of business men, and that he was not a voluntary tenant of that inner cabin.

"Why, it's Lincoln Lore, the Wall street broker!" said Toby, after a searching look. "Found at last! And just where I thought he might be!"

The man in the cabin kept his hands over his face, and for some time he did not move.

All at once, however, he sprang up and panted like an imprisoned eagle; he shut his hands madly and uttered some words which Toby did not understand.

"It's the broker, sure!" muttered the deck spy. "I'd like to let him know that I'm here, but perhaps that wouldn't be best just now. But it won't be for long. We'll soon have him out of here!"

Having seen enough, Toby slipped from under the cabin coping to make for the gang plank.

He was elated with his triumph. The police and the city should hear of another triumph by Toby Tip & Company!

He was half way to the gang when he heard:

"That's the young spy, Joe!—It's the chap Dick saw!"

"Serve him like we served the other one," was answered. "That rat's safe,

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anyhow, and this one will drop where he did."

Toby's ears were deafened by a thunderous report, a severe pain pierced his shoulder and a faintness came over him as he had gained the plank.

He had been shot by one of the villains!

A stagger; then he toppled over, and was lost to view.

"There he goes, and in good time, too. Here comes a cop!"

The last thing the boy detective remembered was a sudden baptism in the cold water; then the consciousness of sinking to immeasurable depths; then utter obliviousness.

When Toby opened his eyes again he was lying on his back, amid the most profound blackness.

He heard sounds, but they seemed mixed in his ears, and he could not make out a single intelligible word or action.

Had he been taken back upon the Strongbow and shut up in a dungeon somewhere in her hold?

Or was he really in another world, and amid the darkness of its unknown recesses?

His limbs ached and his garments were soaking wet.

He felt on either side of him, and—touched the ground!

Then he thought that he might be underneath the pier.

He knew what human nests there were in such places, and felt that perhaps some dock rats had pulled him from the water into the darkness of the place.

"I'm in a rat's nest, sure enough," concluded the boy, as he caught the glimmer of a light on a level with his body, and thought he saw some figures behind it. I'm under the pier up in the docks, but I'm hurt."

The least movement of his shoulder pained him, and by degrees he recalled his adventures on board the ship, the shot, and subsequent tumble from the gang plank.

He was free—that was evident; then he must act; he had no time to lose.

He moved to the edge of the den and looked out upon the water.

Yes, he was in a wharf-rat's nest, up above watermark, under the pier. How came he there? Who had rescued him? Why was he alone?

He did not try then to solve these problems. All he thought of was to work his way from the nest, along under the cribbing, until he could get to the edge of the pier and clamber to the dock.

This he did, for it was not difficult, and soon he stood on the sound soil of the dock, on the street level.

"Ah, what an escape!" he sighed—"what good luck! Guess I was born under a lucky star. Now Toby Tip & Co. is on deck again; so, Mister Nobby Nick & Co. look out for yourselves!"

To the headquarters of Teazer, at the restaurant, he at once turned his steps.

There was a side door to the restaurant, at the rear, leading into a back room, used by guests who wanted privacy. To this he made his way, and, opening the door, ushered himself into the little room.

"Did you hear that? Some one came in," said a voice in the darkness as Toby closed the door.

"Who would come in here?"

"Wait! Strike a light."

The boy detective stood breathless near the door. In another moment a match flared up, and by its light he beheld two roughly dressed men.

"Hit's de boy's ghost! Look, Jim! Hit's the rat wot fell off the side's plank!"

Down went the match; then there was a scramble for the other door of the room, and Toby was left alone in the darkness once more!

Thus relieved of the presence of the pair, he rushed across the room, found the other door, and let himself into the next apartment, where he found the stairs leading to Teazer's chamber, on the second floor.

"Wot's scared the two tars?" cried a boy who rushed into the room and almost ran against Toby.

"I did. They took me for a ghost—"

"Toby! You look like one, by my soul. Why, you've been in de water, boy."

"That's right, Teazer. I must have struck the wash of the river at low tide, and been fished up by the rats in that nest. But I'm all right side up now with a little wound. Why they ran off and left me I can't say. Thank 'em all the same. But who were those men, Toby?"

"They belong to the old vessel over there at the pier."

"The Strongbow? I thought so. They tried to put an end to me, and I turned the tables on them by nearly scaring them out of their wits."

"They wanted to have a private talk and so I gave 'em this room, but they must have taken the last one. Well, never mind. It's all right now, Toby."

Toby now went up to Teazer's room and examined his wound, by means of a small mirror.

It was very slight, though the bullet had given him no end of pain, and the boys congratulated one another that it wasn't any worse.

Then Toby related all his experience on board the Strongbow, and Teazer listened, open-mouthed, to every word.

"What will you do now?" the waiter boy asked.

"I intend to rescue the broker," was the reply. "It's simply a blackmailing scheme, I now see, and they are holding him for a large sum. They're low enough to sail with him on board and tumble him into the ocean."

"No doubt of it, Toby."

"I don't intend to let grass grow under my feet now," and a half hour later Toby Tip stood in his own little room. He had been there but a few moments when some one came along the hall and stopped at the door.

"Can it be Zip?" cried Toby.

He had locked the door, and the person outside tried the knob and then said:

"Hit's Zip, Toby. Let me in, fo' heben's sake!"

Without hesitation, the boy detective threw wide the door, and a man sprang into the room.

"That's the young rat! See that he doesn't get away this time," he heard spoken, and instantly a thick cloth was thrown over the boy's head and drawn cruelly tight.

"Come, now! We haven't a moment to lose. We've trapped the ferret, and must see that he stays trapped!"

That was said, and then he was seized, lifted from the floor, and borne away.

CHAPTER IX.

A MASK, A FORTUNE, AND A LETTER.

Five minutes had not elapsed before Zip Coppers, looking a little the worse for his own adventures, came to the door of Toby's room and knocked.

No reply came, but he still paused there, in deep cogitation over the now pressing situation.

Zip resolved to wait awhile in hopes

of finding Toby before morning, so dropped to the floor beneath a stairway near the boy detective's door.

Perhaps an hour had passed, when the darky saw some person coming down the hall, saw him pause at Toby's door, and then open it with a key.

Straight inside walked the caller and closed the door behind him.

Instantly Zip was on the alert.

Who and what was the visitor? Why was he there in Toby's absence?

The colored pard would know, and quickly he had pulled himself up to the transom.

He looked in beneath the slightly tipped window.

The man was alone in the room, and Zip saw that he wore a mask which concealed nearly the whole of his face.

He had taken a seat at the table and was looking over some papers in a long, old-fashioned black pocketbook which belonged to the young detective.

Zip could now and then get a glimpse of his dark, evil eyes, which shone like polished coals, and he noted, too, that the hands were encased in kids.

This person evidently did not find anything in the pocketbook to his liking, for he replaced its contents and then returned the wallet to the drawer.

Once more he stood up, when the mask, not very well secured, fell to the floor.

The man was Nobby Nick Noggles!

The mask was readjusted, and then Nick proceeded to search the boy's room thoroughly, and at last turned out the gas.

This was the signal for Zip to vanish.

The night visitor came forth, to be shadowed by the now doubly on the alert darky detective.

Nick walked some distance, when he struck down a narrow side street, stopped at a door, which he unlocked, and then disappeared within.

In a jiffy Zip had come up, and through a slit in the curtains beyond the shutters of the low street windows beheld his quarry.

Nick at once divested himself of some of his clothes and put on others, which completely altered his appearance.

He also put on another hat, and still other gloves.

After this he sat down and smoked a cigar and appeared to be waiting for some one.

Presently Zip heard footsteps, and, falling back into the shadows, he became invisible.

The person who came down the narrow pavement approached the house and entered.

Once more the keen eye of the darky detective was at the window.

"He's safe yet, eh, Perry?" asked Nick, as Zip plainly heard.

"Of course, and will remain so until we choose to let him out."

"What does he say about it by this time?"

"At times he's nearly frantic, and refuses to discuss the point at all; at other times he seems ready to give in and sign the paper."

"He knows what that is?"

"Of course, for he tore the first one up."

"So he did. Well, Perry, we can't afford to let this gold bird go. Indeed, I've been thinking you'd better strike him for more."

"Oh, that's enough."

"But, Perry, do you think he's entirely safe where he is?" asked Nick, with a show of anxiety.

"I don't see why he isn't. You know

that no one would ever think of looking there for him, and then—”

“ You know what the boy did? You know where he was seen.”

“ That’s true, but he won’t be seen there again, eh?”

“ That he won’t! That’s settled for all time, Perry; still, I would like to think they can’t by any possibility find him.”

“ How can they? The captain has injured his leg and is laid up for repairs, and the mate’s master. That ought to settle it, and you know what Jack is.”

“ Jack’s all right.”

“ Of course he is. He’s worth his weight in gold, and sticks to a friend like a tick.”

There was silence for a few moments.

“ I’m going out, Perry,” finally announced Nick. “ You can sleep here tonight if you want to. You’re not needed in your bunk?”

“ Not to-night.”

Zip dropped away from the blinds and disappeared just as the door opened and Nick appeared.

“ I’ll be back between now and tomorrow noon. If you should want me, you know where to find me, Perry,” he called out.

The nobby crook turned toward the main street, the boy spy on his trail.

“ No gittin’ away from dis chicken,” said Zip to himself, as he closely shadowed the rascal.

Nick stopped at a street stand and picked up an apple.

The old woman who watched the stand under her flaring light reached out her hand for the money and drew back suddenly.

“ What’s the matter, mother?” asked Nick.

“ It’s that hand!” said the fruit vendor.

Nick held his hand, gloveless now, in the light, and laughed.

“ What’s the matter with it?”

“ It’s a bad one?”

“ See here, do you pretend to tell fortunes, mother?”

“ Don’t I? Wasn’t I a seventh daughter, and who can read hands better than Mother Apples?”

Once more Nick laughed, and, seeing no one near, he thrust his hand across the heap of fruit and let the old woman inspect it a moment in silence.

She bent over it with her wrinkled face and piercing black eyes, and her finger moved lightly across the palm.

“ You want the truth, don’t you?” she asked.

“ That’s what your patrons always get, I suppose?”

“ Nothing less,” was the curt answer.

“ Here’s a lot of cross lines—bars.”

“ Bars, mother? What sort of bars?”

“ Bars of iron—the kind that shut one in prison!”

Nick seemed to start a little.

“ Go on,” he commanded.

“ Here is a line which is nearly faded. It means a good deal when it looks that way.”

“ A good deal of good luck?”

“ Lots of evil!” said Mother Apples. “ It means evil for you, and you are in the toils. There, that’s all. I don’t care to read your hand any longer.”

Nick withdrew his hand and affected to treat the incident with derision.

“ Here, that pays you for apples and fortune, doesn’t it?” he demanded, flinging a dollar upon the cloth. “ Thanks, Mother Apples! Some day when I’m in clover I’ll come to you and tell you that for once your fortunes were no good.”

“ You’ll never come and say that to me,” was the prompt answer.

Zip had overheard all from a safe retreat.

Mother Apples watched the man keenly while he remained in sight, and when he turned a corner gave a solemn shake of the head, as if to confirm her prophecy.

Zip, keeping Nick in sight, traced him nearly to the pier, when he entered an eating house and seated himself at one of the tables.

No one joined him this time, and when he had refreshed himself he rose and wrote a note on the counter, which he handed to the clerk at the desk.

Zip waited for him to come out, and as he did so he dodged into the place without being seen.

In another moment Zip was at the desk and was reaching his yellow hand toward the young clerk.

“ De gemmen what jes’ went out wants de note he left wid you,” said Zip. “ Him concluded not to send it. I se to take hit to him.”

The clerk looked at Zip, but did not suspect, for he reached in the desk and took out the letter.

This he placed in Zip’s hands, and the darkey detective transferred it to his own pocket.

“ Dat’s wot I call a trump kerd,” mused Zip, as he passed out. “ All’s fair in love an’ wah, an’ dis is de latter.”

He did not stop until he was at a safe distance from the restaurant; then he pulled forth the letter, unfolded the paper, and glanced at the writing, which was good and clerky in appearance.

“ Jehosaphat!” cried Zip. “ Hit’s worth hits weight in gold. Now, whar’s Toby?”

Yes, what had become of the boss boy ferret?

CHAPTER X.

A MYSTERY IN YELLOW.

All that night the darkey waited for his pard’s return, but the young detective came not. The most anxious yellow boy went back and forth between his lodgings and the piers several times on the lookout for his partner.

It was the longest night in Zip’s recollection, and he hailed the morning with delight.

Now he would strike Nick’s trail again.

On a former occasion he had tracked the dandy plotter into Pell Street, so thither he went and kept watch over a certain house for some time.

He was able to do this on account of having a friend across the street who loaned him his front room, on the second floor, for his purpose, and, seated at the window, behind the curtain, the keen eyes of the darkey kept vigil on Nick’s home.

Long he watched and waited; then he saw a little Chinaman emerge from the house and look carefully up and down the street before he moved away.

“ It’s Choo Chin; I know him,” said Zip to himself. “ I’ve met him before, an’ in dis very street, too. He is one o’ dem crafty, cunnin’ yallerskins who are always into some sort o’ mischief, an’ he’s hyar on dat same business.”

Choo Chin very soon came back and re-entered the house, and Zip watched on.

A few minutes later he saw Nobby Dick come out, dressed in the height of fashion, and fitting on his gloves while he paused on the steps.

There was a look of triumph on his face, and as he moved away with agile step.

Zip was about to quit the window opposite and take after the fellow when he

caught sight of Choo Chin’s face at one of the windows, and that sight kept him at his post.

Not until the Chinaman emerged from the house did the darkey leave his lookout and pass from the house.

“ Why not?” asked Zip of himself. “ I might find a clew in de house over there. I’ll look for it, anyhow.”

He did not intend to enter the house by the front door, for that would have been too risky, but in a few minutes he somehow reached the cramped backyard and managed to slip into the place.

It was Zip’s first visit to Nick’s quarters, and he found that the place really was fitted up with a luxuriousness exceeding anything he had seen, and the darkey’s eyes opened to their widest as he went from chamber to chamber.

“ He’s fixed like a prince,” said Zip to himself. “ Dis man called Nobby Nick knows what’s he doin’ when it comes to puttin’ on style; but—”

He paused suddenly, for a singular noise came to his ears from a distant part of the house, and he leaned toward the sound.

All grew ominously still while he waited and listened.

He then advanced to a door and opened it carefully, listening all the time, and looking up the stairs, down which the noise seemed to have come.

All at once he heard it again.

This time it sounded like a groan, and the next moment the darkey ferret was on the stairs.

Half way up the flight he stopped, for again came the same sound.

It seemed to emanate from a room in the hall on the second floor. The boy bounded to the door and put his ear to the keyhole.

Some one was inside, but Zip could not make out a single object.

He tried the knob, but it would not turn, and the transom was shut, so he could not make out anything by it.

He was still at the door when he heard a sound between a voice and a screech, and when he turned he saw bounding down the corridor the little monkey-like form of Choo Chin.

Already the Chinaman was ready to fall upon him, and Zip had just time to brace himself against the wall to receive the attack.

Choo Chin uttered another screech as he landed upon the darkey, who threw him off and nearly across the corridor.

In another moment they were at it, and, being nearly equally matched, they had it right and left for the mastery.

Agile though Zip was, the Celestial was a little the best as a wrestler, and the darkey found himself pressed against the wall with Choo Chin’s hands at his throat.

Zip was pressed to the floor, and the Mongol was upon him.

“ Wattu bring you here?” demanded Choo Chin, whose almond eyes seemed to emit sparks of fire.

“ Why you commee to dis house?”

“ Dat’s my business.”

“ Melican boy pay for his comin’. Him no business here.”

“ You’re Choo Chin, an’ you’ll get yo-self inter trubble if you interfere with me.”

“ Yallar boy in trouble now,” laughed the Oriental.

The Chinaman’s knee seemed to imbed itself in Zip’s bosom, and he could not dislodge it.

At the same time Zip’s strength was waning, for the heathen guard was the wiriest, and his limbs were as supple as those of a leopard.

"Yallar boy won't talkee!" hissed Choo Chin. "Him spy!"

"Wot ar' you?" retorted Zip. "Wot are you but the spy of Nick Nuckles, an' who've you got in dat room yonder?"

This infuriated the Chinaman more than ever, for in another moment the long, yellow fingers of the Celestial closed tightly on the boy's throat.

It was life or death now.

"Yallar boy die here!" cried Choo Chin.

The now desperate Zip, by a great effort, managed to free his throat of the terrible hands and, at the same moment, his own fingers were on the heathen's windpipe.

The Chinaman gasped. He tried to break from the boy's grip, and in the struggle they rose together and for a moment faced each other like gladiators catching breath.

"Who's in dat room?" demanded Zip, and he pushed the Chinaman against the wall, and all his strength in the clutch of h's hands.

Choo Chin grew black in the face; his hands dropped to his sides, and, at last, he became limp and unconscious in the darkey's awful grip.

Zip let him slide to the floor, where he lay like one dead, though he still breathed, by gasps.

"Mebbe he carries de keys to de room," suddenly thought Zip, stooping over his enemy and searching the queer garments.

A bunch of keys was struck in the oversack's pocket; and then, keys in hand, the boy detective sprang up and rushed toward the door.

The first key tried slipped easily into the lock, and the darkey threw wide the portal.

But, the room was empty!

It was a mystery that confronted the boy, for just before the fight he had heard some one groan in that very chamber, but here not a sign of life confronted him, and he stood breathless and amazed in the middle of the apartment.

What had become of the tenant of the chamber, and who had it been?

In the hall still lay Choo Chin, but not in the position he had left him, for the Celestial had recovered and crawled nearly to the head of the stairs and was looking over the flight, to the floor below.

He did not see Zip.

All at once the darkey ferret saw the yellow hand of Choo Chin feel along the wall and suddenly stop.

"Dar's a button dar," said Zip, watching the dusky fingers as they essayed to press it. "He's tryin' ter spring some sort of trap on me, an'—"

He was interrupted by a strange sound, and the next instant the whole stairway seemed to sink out of sight.

Choo Chin fell down with it and vanished, and as it settled back the little Celestial was not to be seen.

"Dat beats Mistah Herrmann an' all de rest o' dem magicians," cried Zip, falling back with blanched cheeks. "Choo Chin oughter go on de stage an' perform. Whar is he now?"

He ran to the head of the flight and looked down.

Choo Chin was gone, and everything looked as usual in the place to the dusky boy of the trail.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VALUE OF A PIGTAIL

Zip, the detective, did not know whether to trust the magic staircase or not.

There might be another button in another part of the house, and while he was on the stairs it might fall and precipitate him to his death.

"I'll try hit, anyway," he said, at last. "I kin git down dar about as fast as she kin fall," and he sprang down the flight, landing suddenly in the hall below.

He had reached that place safely, but did not know what would be the Chinaman's next movement.

Zip's hands were ready for another tussle with his little foe, but he was not given the opportunity, for a door flew open in his face, and he was struck by a missile which came from the room, and staggered back.

Out of the parlor like a thunderbolt leaped the figure of the Celestial and fell upon Zip once more.

This time it was an easy victory for Choo Chin, for the darkey detective had been rendered almost helpless by the missile by which he had been struck, and was an easy prey.

Choo Chin uttered a shout of triumph as he wrapped his hands about the neck of the half-unconscious Zip, whom he dragged into the parlor and cast upon Nick's fine sofa.

Zip came back to consciousness in a short time and covertly watched the Chinaman.

He saw Choo Chin at the table untangling a red cord which seemed to have twisted itself into a maze of threads, and the yellow fingers worked swiftly, while the dark face of the Mongolian was seamed with fierce delight.

"That's for me," passed through Zip's mind. "Hit's de las' fight o' my life, an' if I don't conquer now, I'll never win."

Choo Chin continued at his work, and at last the cord was untangled and fell at the Celestial's feet.

Choo Chin stooped and picked it up, and then made a running noose, all of which the darkey detective saw.

All at once the Chinaman turned upon the boy, and, grating his teeth, came forward with the noose in his hand.

Zip's upward spring was so sudden that the little fellow fell back with a cry of affright, and in an instant the darkey was coming at him with an uplifted chair.

"Hit's my time once mo!" cried Zip. "I'll beat you down ter China if you tempt ter strangle dis chile. Stand whar ye ar', yaller Choo!"

Choo Chin did not obey, but threw up his hands, and the chair came down with crushing force.

Zip promptly followed up his stroke, and before the Chinaman could recover his hands were tied with the crimson cord and he sat dejectedly on the sofa.

"De table's turned!" said Zip, coming close and grinning in the Mongolian's face. "Hit's de las' time dey'll turn fo' you if you don't talk truthfully."

"What dusky boy wantee to know?"

"Who was shut up up stairs in dat room?"

The little, elongated eyes seemed to twinkle as if their owner possessed the secret and no one else.

"You know who was in dat room, Choo Chin."

"Boy go up an' see."

"I've been in the room, but it was empty. You pressed a button somewhar in de house an' emptied it."

"Boy rightee. Him gone!"

"Come, you needn't boast o' yer deed, because I have you in my hands now, an' dar may be no Choo Chin by de time I finish wid yer. I am Zip Coppers, de

detective o' de docks, an' you're only a yaller Chinaman wot's hardly worth killin'."

To this the little prisoner on the sofa made no reply, an' Zip caught his arm.

"I'll take yer cue first!" he hissed.

The next moment he twisted the jet black cue of Choo Chin in his hand and drew his knife.

"De fact or de cue!" cried Zip.

Choo Chin at first did not seem to think that the other would carry out his threat, but when he saw the knife laid against his precious pigtail he sank back with a gasp.

"Off hit goes if you won't talk, Choo Chin."

The little man gasped again.

"Who was up stairs?"

"De white boy."

"When did he come here?"

"Last night."

"Who brought him—Nick?"

Choo Chin slowly shook his head.

"You know, you yaller rascal!" cried Zip, pressing his knife against the pigtail.

Choo Chin protested that he did not, and appeared to be in earnest in his protestations.

"You've seen him, though?"

The Chinaman nodded.

"Was he bound?"

"Much tied," was the reply.

"Whar is he now?"

No reply, and Zip continued:

"You know, and you must tell. You will come with me. Come, Mr. Choo Chin. We'll go up an' see."

He pulled Choo Chin from the sofa and dragged him into the hall.

They went up stairs together, the Chinaman under protest and the darkey detective defiant and determined.

The door of the room of mystery still stood ajar, for Zip had not relocked it after his hunt, and there he turned upon his prisoner and pointed into the tenantless room.

"Where is Toby?" he demanded.

Choo Chin, looking innocent, shook his head, but the boy ferret did not believe him.

"Very well," he said, in a nonchalant manner. "You won't tell, eh? Hyar goes de pigtail."

Once more the knife fell upon the plaited locks, and the Chinaman recoiled with an exclamation of terror.

"You will talk now, will you?"

"Choo Chin talkee."

"Then see dat you does," was the answer, but the knife was not removed from the pigtail. "Whar is Toby?"

"In the pit."

Zip started.

"Whar's de pit?"

Choo Chin threw a hasty glance beyond the room.

"Not here, I guess. Take me to it."

The eyes of the Chinaman suddenly beamed with hope.

"Choo Chin will show the yaller boy," said he.

CHAPTER XII.

A GLORIOUS FIND.

The Celestial left the room, closely followed by Zip, and went down stairs.

They passed into the parlor, and thence into another room beyond it, and one which the darkey detective knew must be directly underneath the mysterious room overhead.

This chamber was foul-smelling and dark, and the Chinaman stood near Zip with his hands tied.

"Choo Chin can't show yallee boy with his hands tied," said he, at last.

"That's a good scheme!" laughed the

darkey. "You want me ter give you all de rope in de world, eh? Not while dis chile's name is Zip Coppers."

"Vellee well, den. Yallee boy can't see the pit."

By this time Zip had struck a light, and was holding the match up while he hunted for a gas burner. Spying one in a little while, he touched the flame to it and lit up the room.

It was a rough-looking place, and, for all the darkey knew might well be the way to a pit of darkness and death.

"Show me de way ter de pit," he said, looking at Choo Chin.

The Chinaman took a step forward, and seemed to shrug his shoulders.

"Is it in yon corner?" asked Zip.

A shake of the head was the reply he got.

"Come, I can't stay hyah all day. Off comes de pigtail, dis time fo' sartain."

The hand of Zip for the fifth time seized the cue, and the knife was lifted for its curtailment, when a noise was heard in another part of the house.

Choo Chin's eyes opened with hope.

"Not a sound, not a cry," threatened Zip. "De first sign, an' off comes de cue!"

A door had opened and shut.

Zip put up one hand and lowered the light, until just enough remained to show him his enemy and the room.

Some one had come in.

"Choo Chin," called a voice, which Zip recognized as being Nobby Nick's!

The Celestial seemed on the eve of answering the call, but a look from Zip beat back his desire.

"I'm back, Choo Chin. Come here at once. I've got work for you. In the name of thunder, where is that yellow dog, anyhow? I left him here, and he was not to quit the house."

Choo Chin looked at Zip, and wanted to speak, but the menace of knife and eye deterred him.

They heard Nick in the parlor, heard him about the hall, and then looked at one another.

"Will he come in here, think ye?" whispered Zip.

"Chinaman no say," was the reply.

"Does he eber visit dis yer place?"

"Sometimes."

"Very well; if he opens dat door off comes de pigtail," and with this threat Zip watched the portal with eager eyes.

Once there came toward the door footsteps in the parlor, but they paused before they quite reached it.

"Hang the rascal, he's gone out," they heard Nick say. "I think I know where to find him, and I'll give him a shaking up that'll teach him a lesson."

Once more a door beyond the little room opened and shut, and then the front door did the same.

"When he shakes you up, Choo Chin, jes' let me know," grinned Zip; but the little Celestial was in no mood for fun.

"I'll look into the pit now. If you don't reveal it when I have counted three, you lose your best possession—de cue! One—two—"

Choo Chin started forward and suddenly stamped on the floor.

"Hit's dar, is it?" said Zip.

The Mongolian nodded.

The young darkey detective leaned forward and gazed at a certain spot on the floor.

"Press de button," he commanded, looking up at the silent Chinaman. "No foolishness, Choo Chin."

The foot of the Celestial moved forward, and the next moment Zip fell back from the pit, which yawned at his feet!

It was a dark chasm which met the

boy's gaze, and the enemy, with his little eyes, seemed to wonder what Zip was thinking about.

"Is he down dar?" asked Zip, pointing down the pit.

There was no reply. The Chinaman stood as immobile as a statue of iron.

"Speak!" commanded Zip. "Tell me de truth."

"You want white bcy?"

"Yes—Toby. Is he down there?"

Choo Chin nodded.

"Who sent him to his doom?"

Silence as before, but in the eyes of the Chinaman a gleam of defiance.

"Down you go to him!" and the darkey ferret clutched the Mongolian's arms.

Choo Chin tried to shrink back and escape the doom which impended, but Zip, with the strength of desperation, thrust him close to the edge of the pit.

"Who sent Toby down there? Who fetched him hyer?"

All at once Choo Chin managed to break from Zip's grip, and in another moment he had fallen back to the wall.

There he stood with his eyes glaring at Zip, and his mien unconquered.

This was more than the darky ferret could stand, and all at once he again threw himself upon the Chinaman, and in the twinkling of an eye Choo Chin was bound so as to be entirely harmless.

Having done this, Zip looked about the place for a rope, and after a little search discovered just the thing he wanted.

With this in his hands he approached the pit and then made one end of the rope fast to a bit of immovable furniture in the room.

He now bent over the dark hole and made a trumpet of his hands.

"Toby? Toby?" he called.

There came up from the depths below the faint cry of some one in peril, and Zip swung himself clear of the sides of the pit and began to descend.

It did not take him long to reach the bottom, and he stood on solid ground with his hand on a human being.

The brave boy had found Toby!

"Hit's you, Tobe?" said Zip.

"It's me, Zip," was the reply, when the gag had been taken from the dock boy's mouth.

The boys did not stop to exchange congratulations, but began to quit the pit, which they managed to do, aided by the rope.

On the floor above, Choo Chin was as harmless as ever, and Toby and Zip concluded to leave him where he was.

They went through Nick's quarters, but did not find anything that looked like a clue to the mystery they were after, and when they had emerged from the place and were safely away Zip asked Toby for an account of his adventures since they last separated.

Toby complied with the request, and in time the story led up to the seizure in his room.

"When I heard the voice in the hall, Zip, I thought you had come back, but the moment I opened the door I knew I was mistaken. But it was too late to escape, for the men sprung upon me, and before I could defend myself I was in their clutches.

"I was bound and gagged, and in this condition was taken away in a carriage. We were some time on the streets, making a good many turns, and at last I was lifted from the vehicle and carried into the house where you found me.

"I thought all along that I had fallen into Nick Noggles's hands, but, being blindfolded, could not see him. In the room where you first heard me I was

tied in a chair and placed exactly in the middle of the floor, all for a purpose, as was afterward shown. My bonds seemed to cut to the bone, and I could not keep back my groans of pain. I heard some one beyond the door, and then I heard also some voices. All at once the floor seemed to sink beneath my chair, and I was carried down into the pit. The fall was not very fast, as if certain machinery carried me at the proper speed, and when I landed on the floor of the pit I gave up for lost, for who, thought I, would ever find me in that abode of darkness."

"You're found, all de same!" cried the dusky skin pard, his eyes lighting up with triumph as he looked into Toby's face. "We're still in de ring, eh, Tobe?"

"Still in it for vengeance!" cried Toby, laying his hand on Zip's arm. "These rascals shall not profit by their rascality. I will live to see every one behind the bars."

"Includin' Jack Connard?"

"Certainly, Zip; he's one of the meanest of the gang."

Having told his story, Toby Tip and his partner took a rest, and after a hearty meal waited for night.

Choo Chin, the Chinaman, was good for an all-day stay in the little pit down which the boys had lowered him on quitting Noggles's house, and unless Nick took a notion to search the pit for his tool, which was not likely, they would be safe till then.

"Wot's de programme?" asked Zip.

"A raid on the Strongbow," was the reply.

"Wid de cops?"

"You shall see, Zip. I haven't quite finished the plan in my mind, but it will be ready by night."

CHAPTER XIII.

NICK NOGGLES'S BARGAIN.

Meantime, in another part of the city, and in a back room where they would not be disturbed, sat two of the coolest rascals that ever were candidates for Sing Sing:

"So you're going to try the game, Nick?" said one of the precious pair.

"That I am, Perry. It's got to be a bigger reward, and I think I can get the raise."

"Good luck to you! Be careful, though."

"The kid ferret's safe, and the gold bird still lives in the cage where we put him. No one can balk our little game, and all I have to do is to play the right cards."

They separated on the outside of the building, and Elegant Nick Noggles, neatly attired, made his way up town, alighting from the surface cars near the Lore mansion.

He tripped up the steps in front of the house and rang the bell with his usual coolness.

He was admitted, and handed his card to the maid in the hall.

"Send the gentleman in," said a voice beyond the door, and in another minute Nick stood in the presence of Lucy, the rabob's daughter.

The lovely girl started slightly and lost color at sight of him.

"I have called," said Nick suavely, "to suggest a matter which I believe will be to your interest."

Lucy smiled.

"I am ready to listen to any suggestions which have for their foundation the safety of my father."

"Mine has, I am glad to say, miss."

"Then you may proceed, Mr. Nogles."

"I believe you have offered five thousand dollars for the return of your parent?"

"I have."

"Did it ever occur to you that he may have fallen into the hands of some roustabouts, who mean no real harm to him, but who are holding him for the purpose of making a little money?"

"A ransom, you mean?"

"Exactly."

"Like the brigands of Italy?"

"Somewhat after their method."

"I blush to think that we have such villains in this country."

Nick Noggles did not wince, though the shot went straight to the target.

"Of course," said he, avoiding her gaze for a moment, "it is deplorable, but I was going to say that these men may be holding back for an increased reward."

"And if I offer ten thousand they may want twenty."

"I think not. They cannot be men who will act unreasonable. I am quite sure that an increase of five thousand would bring about the desired result."

"That would be compromising crime."

"You may look at it that way, but the end always justifies the means, miss. How many articles which are yearly stolen are taken back and reward paid with no questions!"

"That is true, but—"

"I beg pardon," proceeded Nick, "but this is a matter of business. Your father is detained from his home and is kept away from a lucrative business. Since his vanishment he may have lost five times that sum by not being able to look after his brokerage."

Lucy had to admit the truth of this subtle argument, and the next moment she was talking to the cool rascal.

"Would you undertake to negotiate with them?" she asked.

"I, miss?"

"Why not? I believe I can trust you, for you appear to take a deep interest in our welfare."

"Indeed I do, but you might suspect that I was in the secret of this plot if I were to bring about your father's return."

"Not at all!" cried the fair girl, looking Nick squarely in the face. "If you will agree to look after the matter, I will offer ten thousand dollars' reward, to be paid anywhere you suggest upon my father's safe return home."

Nick protested that he had nothing in the matter more than the broker's safety and interests at heart, and after accepting the mission to look after the negotiations he rose and prepared to quit the house.

"I think you will hear from this interview," said he to Lucy.

"I hope so."

"The police, of course, are not to be told of the bargain?"

"Of course not."

"Nor the detectives?"

Lucy nodded.

At the door Nobby Nick touched his hat and wished the girl good-day.

"That's the man the boy detective was asking about!" she exclaimed as she shut the door. "That is the same person who sent me the suggestive note the other day. And to think that I've made a bargain with him! Why, he may be as deep in the mire as any one, but father is to come home, no matter what it costs."

She had barely turned to the parlor, when the bell rang again, and Lucy went to the door.

"I'm back again, Miss Lucy," said a voice, and Toby stood before her.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOBY ON THE WARPATH.

The boss boy detective of New York entered the house and the young girl looked at him speechless.

"I see you've had a caller," said Toby.

"Yes."

"Was he welcome, Miss Lucy?"

"Not very, and I wasn't looking for him."

"Of course not, but the unexpected happens. I haven't looked for him myself and he's turned up to my sorrow," and the boy recalled his adventure in the villain's house.

Lucy ushered Toby into the parlor and remained silent.

She was thinking of her promise to Nobby Nick and couldn't see how she could honestly break it, no matter if it had been made to a scoundrel.

Toby appeared to understand the situation, for, leaning forward, he said:

"I hope you didn't increase the reward at the suggestion of that man, miss?"

Color left the fair one's face and she looked away for half a second.

"Well, if you have, I won't say anything against it, for it would be too late," he went on; "but just now that man is interested in the matter and we will have to strike soon if we balk him."

"I am under promise not to tell what passed between us," remarked the broker's daughter.

"Oh, that's all right. Don't let me cause you to break that promise. I am not under a promise to him and I intend to prevent him from taking in a dollar of your fortune."

"But father must come home," said Lucy, earnestly.

"And home he shall come! The water shall give up its secret."

"The water!" cried the girl with a start.

"Yes. Now, Miss Lucy, if you will agree to one thing, and that is not to issue the new reward till you see me again—"

"Why, certainly, I can agree to that proposition. I did not tell him when I would increase the reward."

"Just hold it back, then. You won't have to pay a dollar for your father's return."

"Why not?"

"Simply because Toby Tip & Co. won't charge you a cent for their services."

"Oh, it's to be your work, is it?"

Toby smiled.

"It looks that way," said he.

"But I don't see how you're going to bring him back. Why, you are boys and this matter is puzzling the police of the city."

"We're boys only in years, miss," answered Toby, proudly. "I fancy Toby Tip & Co. can do some things fairly well, and this matter in particular."

The boy picked up his hat and crossed the room.

"When will you report?"

"Not later than to-morrow night."

"I shall be in suspense till then," replied Lucy.

"I don't think we shall, miss. Now, don't let that rascal play out his hand, for it's the coolest one ever played in this city. He's held all the trumps till now, and thinks he will hold them till the close of the game, but he won't."

"I'm pleased to hear you say that."

Toby passed from the mansion and walked away.

"He's playing his last hand," he said to himself. "It's Nick Noggle's last game, and he seems to realize it. Jack Connard said the other night that the Strongbow wouldn't sail for at least ten

days. She's ready to pull out at a moment's notice."

Once more under cover of night, the figure of Toby Tip moved towards the docks, and there he was joined by Zip, who had been waiting for him.

"How goes it, Zip?"

"She's there yet."

"Who's gone on board or left the vessel?"

"Nick is ober dar now—jes' went aboard."

Toby went down the pier and taking up a station behind a lot of bales near the suspected vessel fell to watching her closely.

Zip had glided off in another direction and the dock ferret with his senses on the alert was playing the last hand in the exciting game of the broker mystery.

By and by he saw two figures quit the vessel and appear on the pier.

They were Jack Connard and Nobby Nick.

He did not follow them as they moved off, but sprang up and darted across the plank and climbed like a squirrel to the Strongbow's deck.

For the second time since the opening of the game he dropped cat-like upon the planks and looked about him.

He saw no one.

From a distant part of the ship came the refrain of a sailor's song, and Toby's ears caught the sound and he listened closely, as if he wanted to remember the chorus.

As the song died away he bounded forward and went down the main ladder.

He knew where he wanted to go.

The sight he had seen over the top of a certain door on the vessel was still fresh in his mind, and he knew where that door was.

Toby Tip soon stood near the portal and saw beyond the crevices a dim light.

"He's there yet," thought the boy detective. "I have again come back to Lincoln Lore's prison."

He was in the act of laying hands on the latch when he heard voices behind him, and upon looking over his shoulder he perceived a light bearing down upon him.

Behind it moved a man, whose stalwart figure the boy saw, and while he watched it he stood ready for defense.

Was he to be balked now?

Toby had not come to the heart of the Strongbow unarmed, and now he felt that he would have to use his weapons.

In an instant he leaned against the door with a revolver in his hand.

Discovery was imminent.

On came the light, and the corridor was so narrow that it would be impossible for the bearer of the lantern to pass Toby without a collision.

Suddenly up went the boy spy's arm, and he covered the man behind the light.

"Halt there!" said the boy ferret in low but distinct voice.

"Jericho! what's that?" cried the other, stopping short and throwing up the lantern. "By Jove! it's a kid with a gun."

"As you please, sir. Don't move, but stand where you are," was the answer. "You won't be hurt if you obey me—"

"If—I—obey—you? Why, boy, you don't expect Jim Burns what's sailed the seas for twenty years to obey you, and not Cap'n Sellers? I can't do that—I can't."

"You can and you will," said Toby, sternly. "Open that door yonder."

"That's ag'in orders."

"I don't care if it is! Open it!"

"But, kid—"

"Come, don't 'kid' me," and the boy's revolver seemed to approach Mr. Burns's head. "I am in dead earnest. I want that door open. You can open it."

"It wasn't locked by me."

"Perhaps not, but it comes open, Jim Burns, or you'll measure your length on the floor with a bullet in your head."

"You don't mean that? That would be murder."

"It would be justice. Open the door!"

Toby stepped aside as he finished so as to let the sailor at the door, and he saw Jim Burns move toward it.

"Do you know who's in there?" asked the burly sailor.

"I think I do, and I guess you know, too."

Burns seemed to dally with the lock, and Toby became disgusted.

"I'll count three, Mr. Burns," said the boy.

The sailor started and went to work again.

"Who's out there?" suddenly rang out a gruff voice from behind another door a little distance away.

"That's the captain, and he's a devil!" said Burns. "Captain Sellers is laid up with a broken leg and he can't bear to have any noise on shipboard."

Toby did not stir.

"Go and tell Captain Sellers that I am here in the name of the law, and that the man in yonder must be given up instanter."

Jim Burns looked toward the cabin from which the gruff voice had come, but did not move.

"You won't eh? Then, open the door before you. One—"

"Curse you! you can't get to the wharf with him if you liberate him!" cried Burns.

"Never mind that."

Jim Burns turned for the third time and a key clicked in the lock.

He flung the door open and then turned upon Toby.

"March inside, Mr. Burns!" he commanded.

"Me?"

"You!" and as the sailor crossed the threshold a man sprung forward, and Toby continued: "Now, stand where you are, Jim."

The sailor halted and looked at the man who had just left his bunk.

"Mr. Lore, you will tie that man yonder and come with me," said Toby to the prisoner of the cabin.

There was a cry, accompanied by a start, and the captive looked first at the boy detective and then at Jim Burns.

A rope lay across a beam overhead, and suddenly the broker jerked it down.

"Make a clean job of it!" remarked Toby. "I'll show you if you don't quite know how to secure the rascal."

"Don't touch me!" roared Burns. "If you do I'll yell and alarm the crew."

"You will never alarm another crew!" was the retort from the boy. "Now, go to work, Mr. Lore."

"You seem to know me," said the astonished prisoner.

"Why shouldn't I when all New York is looking for you? It's been a close call, but I'm here."

As the broker, eager now to tie Jim Burns, threw the rope around that worthy's body a sound was heard beyond the closed door.

Jim Burns smiled.

"Quick! Mr. Lore, thump him on the head!" cried Toby.

The broker's arm was lifted in midair, and when it descended the body of Jim Burns sank lifeless to the floor.

CHAPTER XV.

AN INTRACTABLE CAPTIVE.

Nick Nogles went away from the home of Lucy Lore with an exalted opinion of himself.

"We're in luck, just as I said we'd be," he cried. "We'll win the game and rake in the money as easy as picking it up in the street. It was about the slickest job ever put up in the city, and we can't fail now."

He made his way to the wharf and boarded the Strongbow, going at once to a certain part of the vessel, where he met his old friend and co-plottor, Jack Connard.

"It's all right, Jack," said Nick in transports of glee. "I've just seen the girl and she's agreed to increase the reward, and in a little while we'll have the purse in our hands."

"But you want to see that there's no slip this time."

"I'll see to that. Of course there'll be no slip, for I'll have everything so fixed that when the broker gets home the cash will be in our hands and the old ship under way."

"That's it," said Jack. "Now, if the boys are safe and they must be—"

"The young dock vermin?" answered Nick. "They're perfectly safe and won't trouble us any more."

"I'm glad we're out of the woods," grinned the mate. "You see, Nick, I've not been feeling very good of late. I've had one or two startling dreams—"

"I've had my fortune told," broke in Nick with a laugh. "The old woman told me that I would soon be looking out from behind the bars of Sing Sing and that I would never come back to her and say that she couldn't read the future."

"But it's all O. K. at last, thank fortune."

"Yes; how is he now?"

"All right. He's been rather quiet for a day or two, as if he takes it for granted that we have the bulge on him. He still refuses to write a letter home saying that the reward had better be increased; in this he shows his nerve, but he'll weaken before long."

"He don't have to weaken, for the girl will attend to the money part of it, and the moment we get the gold in our hands the cage door opens."

"Would you like to see him?" eagerly asked Jack.

"I don't care if I do."

The men rose and Jack Connard led Nobby Nick down a narrow corridor and stopped at a door.

"You know how to play the hand out," said the burly mate with a glance at his companion.

Nick nodded.

In another moment the mate unlocked the door and Nogles crossed the threshold.

The little room was well lighted from without and Nick saw a man lying on a sofa.

As the plotter came forward, the figure moved, and Lincoln Lore, the missing broker, sat up.

"Good day," said Nick. "You are here yet, I see."

For a moment the man of Wall street did not reply, but his face grew red.

"I don't understand this," he said to Nick. "You're my friend, aren't you?"

"I am nothing less; I have always been your friend, and you know that I would do anything in my power for you."

"Then get me out of this place."

"I would like to do that, but unfortunately, I seem to be in the same boat."

"What, do you tell me that you are a prisoner on this vessel?"

"Unfortunately I am," said Nick, with the coolness of the practiced villain. "I have been seized by some enemy, and am allowed a little more liberty than yourself, but am a captive all the same. In other words, I am a caged eagle, and I wish we could devise a plan for escape."

The imprisoned broker looked at the speaker in doubt just what to think of his reply, and at last his face seemed to soften in looks.

"Who's at the bottom of this scheme?" said he.

"I cannot say. Haven't you seen your enemies?"

"Not fairly. I have grown tired of guessing, but I believe it is a plot for ransom money, and I have been advised to send home for ten thousand dollars with which to get myself out of this trap. But I won't compromise with crime."

"Your daughter might take up your case and pay the sum."

"Lucy can do as she likes, but I doubt if she will compromise with these precious rascals. I would sooner rot here in the hold of this ship than pay the villains a dollar."

"But your business suffers by your absence."

"It does. I have lost largely, but that is nothing compared to my determination not to compromise with these wretches. It is worse than Italian brigandage, and the greatest outrage I ever heard of."

"I should think the police would take the matter in hand."

"They may not have heard of it. It may be supposed that I have gone away on business, but my child must have the shivers over my prolonged absence."

Nick crossed his legs and looked coolly at the victim of the plot.

He saw how completely Lincoln Lore was in his hands.

"If I had your money," said he, insinuatingly, "I believe I would compromise rather than witness the ruin of my business."

"What, let them rob me? My dear fellow, I will never do that. Never!"

"In the event of this vessel sailing suddenly we would be carried to unknown ports."

"Let it be to the end of the world!" cried the broker, striking the round table with his fist. "I won't compromise with them; there!"

Nick Nogles drew back from the determined man.

"I can't help myself. I am in the hands of some inveterate foe, and must take my chances. I haven't any ready money at my command to pay a ransom, and must wait till I am released, if that day ever comes. I was taken from my lodgings at night and spirited here, and I can't tell who did it."

"But you know who your enemies are. I don't."

"I never thought you had any foes."

"Neither did I till the blow fell," said the broker. "It is a mystery to me, but I have nearly come to the conclusion that it is simply blackmail."

Nick then told the broker that his time was up, saying that he had bribed a sailor to let him have a talk with him, and as he walked to the door he said:

"I have just overheard a conversation which leads me to believe that this ship will quit the harbor to-morrow."

"Let it sail!" was the answer. "It can carry me to the ends of the world; but they shan't rob Lincoln Lore!"

As the door closed on the plotter the broker sprang across the room and placed his ear against the portal.

He heard voices in the corridor.
"Is he firm yet?" asked one of the men.

"As firm as a post."

"And you couldn't do anything with him?"

"Not a thing."

"He would not offer the reward suggested the other day?"

"Not a dollar of it."

"But the girl will. There's where we'll beat him. We'll get his money all the same, eh, Nick?"

"That we will. Beat us if they can, Jack!"

Then the voices died away and the captive broker started back with the whitest of faces and a look of astonishment in his eyes.

"I see it all now," he cried. "That elegant devil is at the bottom of the whole matter, and it is his plot. Why didn't I think of this before? Why didn't I get to the bottom of the scheme long ago? I never heard of such a devilish plot for a man's money, and I'm now convinced that he will do anything."

Nick Nogles and Jack Connard walked laughing down the ship's corridor, and the man shut up in the little cabin lost the sound of footsteps and voices.

The discovery of Nick Nogles' treachery fell upon the broker like a thunderbolt.

It fairly stunned him, and he retreated to the table where he threw himself into a chair.

All at once he reached up and jerked a little rope which was suspended from the ceiling.

During his imprisonment his every want had been supplied, and all he had to do whenever he wanted anything was to pull the cord, and a man would come.

He waited for the servant, and the moment the little slide in the door was pushed forward and he saw the sailor's face there, he said:

"Tell the gentleman to come back—the one who was permitted to see me just now."

The face vanished and Lincoln Lore planted himself near the door.

"I guess he's relented," said Nick, to whom the message was taken by the sailor. "I think we'll have the reward from him and the girl both. That will be a double pull, you see, Jack!"

He went off laughing toward the broker's room and unlocked the door.

As he stepped inside he was seized by the broker's hands and thrown against the boards.

"I know you now!" cried Lincoln Lore. "I see through the whole infernal plot. I intend to kill you here."

He was as furious as a tiger, and Nick Nogles felt the hands of his assailant digging their way toward his windpipe, while he could hardly articulate a word.

"It's your work. It's your plot, and you're playing for high stakes," continued the maddened broker. "I shall hold you here till I see your life go out. It's a poor game which two cannot play at, and you shall discover it to your everlasting sorrow."

But Nick, rendered desperate by the situation, managed to loosen the hands a little, and his loud cry for help rang throughout the ship.

Jack Connard heard it, and sprang down the corridor with great speed.

Into the room he rushed, and took in the situation in a moment.

Jack was as strong as a giant, and his first movement was to seize the broker and bend his head back till he threatened to break his neck.

This procedure frightened Nick, and he tore Jack's hands loose.

Don't kill the goose of the golden egg, Jack! Just throw him over on the sofa. He was playing a little game of his own—that's all."

Jack relented and did this, and the two worthies betook themselves from the cabin.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FLIGHT FOR LIFE.

The scenes we have just described happened the afternoon of the day which was still to witness Toby Tip's second invasion of the Strongbow, and his partial rescue of the missing gold-bug by using Jim Burns as a means of getting into the little cabin.

The moment the broker, at Toby's suggestion, felled the sailor and saw him sink an inanimate mass to the floor, the noises in the corridor strangely grew still.

"Come!" cried the boy ferret. "Now's our time."

Toby and the broker rushed from the cabin, the boy taking care to shut the door and lock it on the outside, thus imprisoning Jim Burns, and in another instant they were making their way toward the ladder.

The boy detective still carried the revolver, which he intended to use if an emergency arose, and they succeeded in gaining the ladder without molestation.

But as the boy was half way up the ladder, with the broker just behind him, he heard a loud voice on deck.

It was the voice of Jack Connard.

The burly mate, who had given them so much trouble, had come between again, and the situation looked troublesome.

"Keep close to me," said the boy to his friend, the broker. "We may have to fight for freedom before we enjoy it."

They emerged upon the deck, and the young ferret saw before him Jack and another sailor, who in another moment would have come down the ladder.

"Halt!" cried the mate.

Toby covered him with the revolver, thrusting it forward with a good deal of pleasure, for he cordially hated Jack, and the big fellow recoiled with an exclamation of terror.

"Stand back!" cried the boy. "We are going to quit this vessel, and the man who interferes with our intention is liable to fall dead in his tracks."

"It's both o' them!" said Jack's companion. "In heaven's name, how did they git out?"

There was no answer from Jack, for his eyes seemed on the eve of quitting his head, and he stared at Toby and the broker as they moved forward coolly and with vigilance.

"The plank's gone! You can't get ashore. It's been pulled in for the night."

One glance was sufficient to show that this was the truth, and it seemed to give Jack Connard a good deal of satisfaction.

"Put it down!" thundered the boy ferret.

"Can't do that, boy. It's agin' orders."

"Whose orders?"

"The cap'n's."

"You will disobey the captain!" said the boy. "Put down the gangplank."

Still Jack hesitated, drawing himself up to his true height and glaring at the boy detective like a wild beast.

"One second, Jack Connard. You and your companion can throw the plank, and you will do it."

Toby moved a step nearer and the two men looked at one another.

At that moment something came over the side of the Strongbow and dropped like a cat upon the deck.

Toby uttered a cry of joy.

It was Zip Coppers!

The darkey detective came forward, seen by Jack, who greeted him with an oath, and planted himself beside his friend.

"The plank is up, Zip," said Toby, in lowered tones, "and I've just ordered Jack Connard to replace it."

"Dat's de thing. You heard Toby, sir?"

Jack threw a curse at the dusky boy and glared again at Toby Tip.

"Down with the plank, Jack!"

There was doom in the boy's voice, and Jack Connard, with a look at the open hatch moved in the right direction.

His companion followed him.

Covered by the revolver, the two men lifted the plank and ran it out upon the edge of the wharf, and Toby told the broker to go forward.

This Lincoln Lore was eager and ready to do, and in a moment he had stepped upon the plank.

Toby covered the retreat, keeping his face turned toward the sullen and beaten mate, and at last stepping upon the plank himself.

"We'll see you later," he said.

"When?"

"You know when."

"Come whenever you can, but don't forget that Jack Connard is a lion in your path."

"You've already been that, but lions even get the worst of the battle sometimes. Good-night."

Jack sprang forward as Toby vanished, but he stopped suddenly and whirled upon his friend.

"They're gone, Joe. There must be some treachery on board the ship. Did Jim betray us?"

"We'll go and see."

The two worthies rushed below and found the door of the broker's prison locked.

Jack threw his figure against it and crashed it in, rushing forward to find Jim Burns on the floor still unconscious.

"The boy did it—did it himself," he cried, looking up at his companion. "Joe, the broker is gone and the young dock rat has turned the tables on us all."

"We must alarm Nick."

"That's right. They'll swoop down upon Nick like eagles now, and if they catch him it will be all day with us."

Jack rushed upon deck, but could not see anything of the late captives of the plot.

Meantime, Toby and his friends were some distance from the docks, and a carriage was rapidly bearing all three over the stones of New York.

The broker was silent, but thoughtful.

He was going home and back from the clutches of as great a lot of scoundrels as the city ever sheltered.

"Who is this Boston you've been telling me about?" he suddenly asked Toby.

"Of Boston we know but little, but we know enough to see that he's out with Nick Nogles, and is ready to tell all he knows about him."

"Do you know where to find him?"

"I do."

"Then summon him to my house after you've seen me home. I want to crush this plot against me."

"It will be crushed."

A few minutes later the carriage stopped in front of the broker's mansion, and there was a cry of joy in the hall-

way as Lucy fell upon her father's bosom.

"Now!" cried Toby, seizing Zip's arm, "we must strike fast from this time on. They will warn Nick, and if we rest a moment the bird will escape."

"Dat's wot!" exclaimed the darky detective, and the following minute the boys were going away in the same carriage.

They left the vehicle some distance from the broker's house and took it afoot.

In a short time they turned up in front of Nick's residence and saw that everything was dark beyond the door.

"De bird's gone already," said Zip.

"It looks that way, boy; but let us hope not."

They did not tarry very long there, but bolted toward the wharf, where they stopped with a singular cry.

The Strongbow was backing from her moorings, and the noises on deck were understood by the boy ferrets.

Was Nick Noggles out of their way?

Had he been warned by Jack or Perry, and was the archrascal of the plot about to escape justice?

But suddenly the voice of a man rang out above the noises on board the slowly moving vessel.

"Dat's Cap'n Sellers' voice," said Zip.

The old vessel seemed to be arrested in her flight by the Captain's commands, and then came back to her wharfage.

"He won't let her go!" cried Toby.

The almost breathless boys stood in the shadow of a lot of bales and watched.

"There's mutiny on deck," said Toby in a whisper.

"Let 'em fight hit out, Tobe. Dey can't reach us," smiled Zip. "Hit's wolf an' wolf, an' dey might as well tear one another to pieces as enny one."

"This ship shan't go to-night," said the loud, stern voice of Captain Sellers. "I can't go to sea with a broken leg, and there's some rascality afoot which has been going on without my knowledge."

"Never mind him, men," replied Jack Connard. "This vessel puts to sea to-night. Seize the Captain!"

"If you dare!"

Toby and Zip could see that the greatest excitement reigned on board the Strongbow, and they caught sight of a figure supposed to be Captain Sellers, which was firmly planted against a mast.

"Death will strike the first man who disobeys me!" said the same stern voice. "I am captain of this vessel, and I will see that we remain here till our time's up."

This seemed to quiet the others, but suddenly a man sprang over the Strongbow's side and came down upon the pier like a huge ape.

"Don't shoot him!" cried Captain Sellers. "The law will deal with him in the city."

The escaping party came toward the concealed boys, and looked over his shoulders as he vanished toward Teazer's place of business.

"Dat war Jack Connard, de mate," said Zip.

Toby nodded, as he watched the man, and then he clutched Zip's arm.

"He'll warn Nick!" cried he. "They will escape if we don't pounce upon the precious pair. I'm confident now that Nick isn't on board the Strongbow, and we must take care of him."

The boy ferrets darted after Jack, and did not lose sight of him till he vanished into a crowd which had been attracted by a fire, and the boys looked in vain for him.

"Never mind. We must go back to

Nick's haunt," said Toby. "He is in Pell street, in the place where we left the little Chinaman in the pit. Come, Zip."

Eager to play the last hand of the exciting chase, the boys darted away and left Jack Connard to take care of himself.

"De cap'n had de sand, eh, Tobe?" said Zip.

"That he had, and he would have shot Jack Connard but for his lucky escape. Captain Sellers doesn't seem to have been in the plot at all."

Ten minutes later the boy detectives were in the vicinity of Nick's retreat, and there they stopped to round up their plans.

The old house, so well furnished inside, still looked dark, and they wondered if the bird was still in the gilded cage.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRIUMPH OF TOBY TIP & CO.

In the house occupied by Nick Noggles, the rascal of the deep-laid game against the broker's wealth, a different scene from the one outside, was taking place.

Nick was at home.

The sleek villain was in his own domicile and in the parlor, but was not taking his ease.

He seemed to look worn out and cast down, as if impending fate brooded over him while he stood at the little table in the middle of the room.

He did not know that the tireless enemy was so near, nor did he dream that startling events then were taking place on board the Strongbow.

"I wish Perry would come," he said, watching the door impatiently. "He promised to come by this time, and there's Choo Chin, my porter; I can't find the yellow rat."

Ah, if he had looked in the right place he might have found his yellow guard, but Nick did not dream that that very moment the man from the Flowery Kingdom was underneath that very floor.

Toby and Tip watched the house.

No one entered it, and at last they resolved to play their hand out and see where the master spirit of the plot was.

"Now for it, Zip," said Toby to his companion. "You're ready, eh?"

"Always dat way, Toby."

As they were in the act of leaving their retreat a figure came down the sidewalk at a rapid gait and mounted the steps.

"Look!" cried Toby. "It's Jack!"

"Connard, the mate o' de Strongbow!"

Yes, the runaway sailor and would-be mutineer was there, perhaps to warn his master, and the hand of the burly ruffian was on the knob when Toby leaped forth.

"Hands off there!"

Jack turned as if his death sentence had been spoken, and his hand flew to his hip at sight of the boy detective.

"The kid ferret! We have met, boy, for the last time."

"Not quite so fast, Mistah Connard," exclaimed another voice as a lithe form appeared in view, and the mate of the Strongbow looked with a frown into the gleaming eyes of Zip Coppers.

"You, too?" cried the cornered man.

"Whar you find Toby Tip you usually find his shadder, Zip," was the answer, and Jack saw that he was at the mercy of the boy pards.

They commanded him to come down from the step, which he did with reluctance, and stood on the pavement at the boys' mercy.

"Throw your pistol into the gutter!" commanded Toby.

Jack growlingly did so.

"Now go!" commanded the boy detective.

"What; don't you want me?"

"You'll turn up if we do, no fears of that," smiled Toby. "We want the head bird just now."

"Do you mean Nick?"

"Yes, Nobby Nick. Or would you like to ring him up and greet him as he opens the door, Jack?"

"I'll do nothing of the kind—not to save your necks!"

"Very well. Be off, then!"

This unexpected leniency stunned the mate of the Strongbow, but he moved away, with alacrity, taking a last look over his shoulders at the triumphant young beagles.

"Now, ring!" ordered Toby.

The clear tones of the bell were heard in the hall, at which Nick, in the parlor, started, dropping the pen with which he was writing at the table.

"It's Perry at last!" said he. "But why does he ring? He has the key and—"

He crossed the room without suspicion, but in the hall he halted and thrust one hand deep into his pocket.

"Maybe, after all, it's not Perry. One's got to be cautious now. It's the ticklish part of the game, and the cards must be played well if we expect to rake in the stakes."

He went to the door and unlocked it, and as he opened it stepped back a little.

"Is that you, Perry?" he asked.

"Not quite, Nick, alas!" and an agile figure bounded into the hall to be swiftly followed by another. "I don't think you'll see Perry here to-night."

The man recoiled against the wall and stared at the two boys who faced him under the strong hall gaslight.

He knew that the jig was up!

"The broker's at home," informed Toby. "The Strongbow no longer holds its captive and you are our prisoner!"

Prisoner of those two boys!

No wonder Nick glared at the two ferrets with the fierceness of a wolf.

"You're the essence of impudence to thus invade a man's own house," he cried. "This is about the coolest bit o' business I ever heard of."

"Not as cool as the abduction of Lincoln Lore from his office in Wall street. That was a crook game which still puzzles the police of Gotham, but we've solved the mystery and intend to send you behind the bars, for the villain that you are!"

Nick fairly frothed.

"I wish I had crushed you when I had you in my hands," he grated, addressing Toby Tip.

"Why didn't you? There's many a slip twixt Nick and Tip, eh?" The rascal was too mad to speak, but into the parlor at the muzzle of their weapons he was driven; then he was forced to sit down while the eager Zip bound him to the chair.

"Did you find de pig-tail, Mistah Nogges?" asked the dusky lad.

"Choo Chin? No, the scamp ran off at the wrong time, and I failed to find him."

"Mebbe he's in de pit yit, Toby?"

"In the pit?" almost roared the rascal. "You didn't leave the poor devil down there?"

"We did. It's nigher China dan de floor," grinned Zip.

Then the boys investigated; and, sure enough, Choo Chin was found at the bottom of the pit, and when brought up

he was on the verge of suspended animation, but a few teaspoonsful of brandy revived him and he rolled his almond eyes about till he caught sight of Nick in the chair—at which sight he shut his lids, as if to see it no more.

It was indeed a dead beat.

A silent, sullen prisoner was taken to the nearest station house that night, and the charge against him was of such importance as to make the prison keeper a much surprised man.

Lincoln Lore soon heard of the head villain's arrest, and before morning a lot of officers guided by Toby secured the others who were in the secret and brought them from the Strongbow.

Jack Connard was picked up at an obscure sailor's boarding house, where he was in hiding, and in a few hours the whole gang was in the cells of the station.

Boston also came to the front and turned squarely against his old master, Nick. He much helped to tighten the coils about the human lizard, though they would have been sufficiently tightened by the boy detectives, who, without the aid of the headquarters detectives, or the noted specials on the case, had secured one of the greatest victories in the annals of recent city crime.

Lincoln Lore's imprisonment on board the Strongbow became the topic of the hour, and he was called upon to retell it, time and again, until every reporter had had a turn at him.

Of course Miss Lucy was rejoiced over her father's return, and when she offered to enrich the two shoulder-to-shoulder detective pards who had brought him back and punished the guilty, Lincoln Lore added a neat little sum to the original reward, so the cash account of Toby Tip & Co. got a wonderful boom.

The trials of the conspirators drew a large crowd of people, all of whom rejoiced to see justice meted out to the execrable rogues.

Nobby Nick had a chance to ponder over the swift vengeance of justice behind the bars of Sing Sing, and perhaps he recalled Mother Apples' prophecy.

Certain it is that the old woman frequently referred to it to her customers, and said that it was only one of her wonderful revealments, all of which secured for her added business at her fruit stand, and not a little to do in the fortune-telling line.

Some months after the finish of the game, Boston led Miss Lucy to the altar, and our friends, Toby and Zip, were interested spectators of the happy event.

Truly it was a marvelous bit of detective work, but Toby always referred to it as a "soft snap," saying that from the first he believed that Nobby Nick Noggles had a hand in it, and that the missing broker was a prisoner on the Strongbow.

I need not add that Toby Tip & Co. are still on the trail and doing business "at the same old stand."

THE END.

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